

Dhaka, Thursday, April 16, 1992

Hopes for Afghanistan

Slowly but surely, the stage is getting set to put Afghanistan on the road to national reconciliation and peace, perhaps even political stability and democracy. Two pro-resistance news services have just released names of peoples who will form an ad-hoc administration, replacing the Government of President Najibullah, until an interim government can be installed in Kabul. The major task facing the interim administration would be to conduct elections in the war-torn country, hopefully bringing an end to Afghanistan's 13-year civil war.

All this is going roughly according to the plan drawn up by the United Nations, except that the release of the names of members of the proposed Council is said to be unauthorised by the UN. However, the composition made up of former civil servants, ex-ministers and exiled intellectuals is unlikely to raise any controversy as such. Whether these well-known persons, belonging to different schools of thoughts and academic disciplines, can perform as a cohesive team, without a neo-political personality like Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed as its head, remains to be seen. At this stage, one can hope for the best.

For Afghanistan, the real challenges lie ahead. The indication from President Najibullah to get out of the country while the going is still safe removes one hurdle. With his administration's patron — the Soviet Union — no longer on the scene, the days of Najibullah are numbered anyway. However, the Moscow-backed Afghan ruler must still be congratulated for contributing to the process which is already in motion.

The main cause of concern lies with the power-struggle among the resistance groups. The list of members of the proposed Council has been issued by news services which are both allied to hardliners. This may well be a signal of the determination of the hardliners to maintain their dominant position. Among the resistance groups, the moderates hardly occupy any significant position. However, they certainly play an important role on the socio-economic scene of Afghanistan, having benefited from the process of reforms introduced by the successive Moscow-backed governments in Kabul. It will be a pity, indeed a tragedy, if these moderate forces come under attack of hardliners, especially where women's rights, a modern land tenure system and universal education for all are concerned. One hopes that the United Nations will play its role in protecting the moderates and the reforms they represent.

In the final analysis, one should look upon the principal backers of the resistance groups — namely, Iran and Pakistan — to play a constructive role in ensuring that the destiny of the country does not lie entirely in the hands of hardliners. With the latest polls in Iran strengthening the hands of the relatively moderate president, Hashem Rafsanjani, one hopes that Tehran will not take too dogmatic line on Afghanistan. The same, we hope, would be true about Pakistan. However, there are other neighbours of Afghanistan, especially India, which should look at all their options in influencing the trends in Afghanistan, preferably through the UN system rather than on their own. Here, Bangladesh too should have a say, again through the United Nations, to help with the process which has been set in motion.

Celebrating Baishakh

Judging by the widespread and enthusiastic celebration of Pahela Baishakh, the Bengali New Year's Day, this year, it is quite obvious that a full understanding and appreciation of the significance of the day, as a symbol of our cultural identity as Bengalees, is occurring. The celebrations welcoming 1399 have proven that Pahela Baishakh is now a truly national occasion, at a par with the commemorations of February 21, March 26 and December 16.

As is often the case with celebrations with this level of popular participation, some flaws in the coordination between the events of the day seem to be creeping in with Pahela Baishakh as well. Whereas in the not-too-distant past, Chhayanaut was the only organisation holding early morning music session at Ramna Park, there were several others this year. Unfortunately, some of those programmes continued simultaneously, making listening to the music on offer incomprehensible. The crowds at Ramna Park were bombarded by the noise coming from the Shishu Park, and vice versa. This sort of thing can easily be avoided, and ought to be avoided in order to retain the dignity of the occasion. We must remember that celebration of Pahela Baishakh is a national, cultural event, and 'group' or pseudo-political interests must not be allowed to turn the day into some sort of competition, unless the competition can be held separately so that the people can enjoy all the shows.

At this juncture, a word or two about Bangladesh Television (BTV) would not be out of place. It is undeniable that BTV did a splendid job of arranging programmes on the occasion. However, the authorities should consider the possibility of transmitting the early morning events live, so that thousands others who could not be there for one reason or other, can also feel part of the celebrations. At the same time, BTV should arrange for greater coverage of events taking place outside Dhaka, as that is where majority of Bengalees live and where the Bengali calendar is part and parcel of the daily life.

Finally, on this occasion at least, BTV should insist on greater freedom from government control to enable it to project all major events with appropriate importance. There were a number of events which went unmentioned on BTV, and one could not help feeling that the omission was more due to political considerations than anything else. However, as tax-payers and pay-masters of BTV officers and staff, the people expect a greater awareness of the cultural significance of the occasion, one that goes beyond politics of the day.

THE Bangladesh Institute for Development Studies (BIDS) organised a workshop on 12 and 13 March to present the findings of a two year study on an *Analysis of Poverty Trends in Bangladesh*. The study involved Dr. Mahabub Hossain former DG, BIDS, Dr. Hussain Zillur Rahman, Dr. Binayak Sen, Dr. Omar Haider Chowdhury and Ms. Shamim Hamid. The work ranks as one of the best to date in Bangladesh on reviewing poverty trends, analysing the causes of poverty and from this identifying an agenda for poverty alleviation. The work from the study provided a substantive input into the Task Force Report on Poverty Alleviation, where Dr. Mahabub Hossain was the convenor, which spelt out the basis for an immediate action plan for an assault on poverty in Bangladesh during the 1990s.

If one draws upon the findings of this study questions may be raised on the definitive character of the poverty estimates of the study and particularly its trend over time. One can also raise questions about the comprehensiveness of the explanatory powers of the model defining the dynamics of poverty. But until some one comes forward with more reliable primary data on household income and further refines their tools for analysing poverty the BIDS study will serve as a landmark study on poverty and will remain a valuable resource for defining a strategy for poverty alleviation in Bangladesh in the near future.

That the country needs a viable strategy for poverty alleviation is evident from the fact that we still have close to 40% of our population living in conditions of poverty. This is one of the highest level of poverty in South Asia itself host to the largest share of the world's poor. Given the most conservative estimate used in the study of people living in conditions of poverty, in absolute numbers this involves a lot of people, enough to generate concern at the potential for social unrest originating from such a large number of people living in conditions of chronic insufficiency.

Statements of Intent

The incumbent government indicated some concern for the problem of poverty when the Prime Minister agreed to

inaugurate the workshop and before a large audience spelt out some quite positive statements about the commitment of her government to alleviate poverty. Similar statements were registered by the Planning Minister who chaired the concluding session of the workshop on 13 March which extended from 3 pm to 8.30 pm on a Friday afternoon during the month of Ramadan and was attended by, among others, a number of senior civil servants as well as the Resident Representatives of the World Bank and the UNDP in Dhaka.

The concluding session of the workshop was also attended by Mr. Tofey Ahmad a front bench Awami League Member of Parliament. He too spent 5 hours participating in the discussion. The day before the workshop Awami League Working Committee had also been in session discussing its economic platform where poverty alleviation was placed at the top of the agenda.

It would thus appear that the government, the principal opposition party and the donors have all reaffirmed a commitment to alleviate poverty as indeed have all segments of the senior bureaucracy, academics and professionals. One cannot dismiss these commitments as mere rhetoric in the absence of a concrete agenda for action. The Task Force report on Poverty Alleviation has put on record some quite concrete suggestions for action and even sets these initiatives at about Tk. 1200 crores, per year which seems a quite modest sum, around 12% of total public expenditures in the revenue and development budgets.

The BIDS study and the Task Force Report are hardly the last word on the subject but if anyone is really interested in doing something about poverty then they provide the basis for a serious discussion of the problems and possibilities within the government, in parliament, in the media and in various public fora. This discussion can iden-

publication, inside the Army, in an article entitled, 'The role of nuclear weapons in a new world order'.

The core elements of the proposed strategy consists of retaining a smaller strategic nuclear force targeted against 'every reasonable adversary' in the world. It also proposes creating a 'nuclear expeditionary force' which could be used against Third World targets suspected of developing weapons of mass destruction or engaging in hostile actions against Washington, according to published accounts.

This marks a major break from Cold War strategy which assumed that nuclear weapons would be used only against other nuclear powers.

For most of the past 45 years, strategic nuclear warheads are believed to have targeted Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and China only, although analysts here believe contingency plans have also existed for attacks on North Korea, North Vietnam and Cuba.

The final component of the plan also calls for continued targeting of some of the former Soviet republics as 'insurance, in the event that the post-Soviet experiment in

ALLEVIATING POVERTY IN BANGLADESH

Government and Opposition Must be Clear about Policy Premises

This is the first part of a three-part series on alleviating poverty in Bangladesh. The second part will be published tomorrow.

While the weaknesses in the available evidence which can underwrite concrete issues for further study. It can spell out some of the practical difficulties for a government to realise the policy actions suggested in the Task Force report but can at the same time identify alternative measures. What is however central to our discussion is that neither the government, nor the opposition, nor the donors, nor the public can take refuge in the plea that we did not know the extent of the problem of poverty, nor its nature, and that practical

the findings of the BIDS study and the recommendations of the Task Force report on Poverty Alleviation.

The Premise of a Policy for Poverty Alleviation

Both parties should be clear about the premise for taking up a position on poverty alleviation. Since both the government and opposition came to parliament with the votes of what were mostly people who fall below the poverty line, they have a democratic responsibility to improve the

POLICY ISSUES

Rehman Sobhan

suggestions were not at hand to suggest remedial actions. It thus follows that in the face of the available evidence and concrete proposals for action to tackle poverty failure to act on the part of the government within the framework of the forthcoming ADP for 1992-93 or of the Opposition to raise this issue in Parliament will be interpreted as a failure of will and political intent on both their parts. Public statements by both parties on poverty alleviation will thus be seen as rhetorical in content with little attempt by them to invest either their political authority or in the case of the government their budgetary resources to effectively tackle the social and moral disease of poverty.

What indeed may the government and opposition do in the next 3-4 months to register their commitment to the task of poverty alleviation? In the remainder of this discussion I will spell out in summary form a possible agenda for action for the concerned parties, drawing heavily upon

conditions of their constituents within the lifetime of this parliament. Failure to do so will not only bring the credibility of the government into question but may raise doubts about the efficacy of a democratic process where the concerns of the majority of the electorate cannot be effectively registered in parliament. If such a parliamentary system is ever threatened by the enemies of democracy, this same parliament should not be too upset if the same electorate who first challenged autocracy in the streets and then voted this Parliament to power, prefers to remain a silent spectator to the demise of what they deem to be a parliament which appears to be insensitive to their deprivations.

The government must also take into account that when they go to the Paris Consortium meeting every year with their begging bowl seeking commitments of another \$2 billion in aid they do so in the name of the deprived majority of their population.

While successive government may possess many good qualities of head, heart and appearance the legislatures of most donor countries do not appropriate funds for such qualities in the rulers but open their purse strings in the expectation that their largesses will improve the conditions of life of the poor. Conspicuous failure to improve the conditions of life of the poor of Bangladesh over these 20 years could thus be seen as a fraud perpetuated by successive governments in Bangladesh on the tax payers of the donor countries, a fraud connived at by the aid bureaucrats of the multilateral institutions and governments of donor countries. Thus the credibility of the GOB, particular donor governments, multilateral agencies and indeed the whole system of aid dependent development will remain in question as long as such high levels of poverty persist in such countries as Bangladesh.

Moving beyond the political compulsion to tackle poverty is the purely functional need to do so in order to accelerate the development process. A country where the majority of its population remain too poor to purchase the products of a dynamic agricultural and industrial sectors cannot prosper unless it can make a breakthrough into the international market. To feed cloth, house, educate and look after the health of 110 million Bangladesh through generating purchasing power in their hands, provides an unparalleled dynamic for sustained growth of the Bangladesh economy.

To reallocate resources to the poor will thus not only make good market sense it will also be efficient if we accept the prevailing track record of the poor as hardworking, creative, self-sacrificing, patriotic, productive and above all efficient. Innumerable studies at BIDS and elsewhere have reported on the efficiency of agriculture, particularly small including tenant farmers, handloom weavers, the

Dalai Khali entrepreneurs, the versatility of our informal sector, the spirit of adventure of our migrant workers demonstrate the rich potential of the poor segment of our population. But this class remains starved of access to public resources. What resources are committed tend to be monopolised by a narrow elite. This class is as inclined to use such public resources or indeed their directly generated financial surpluses in non-productive uses and even export of capital rather than employment creating investments. This class tend to manage their investments with no conspicuous efficiency, service their loan obligations irregularly if at all and do little to establish their competitive worth in the market place. The one example to the contrary, the garment exporting industry have had the advantage of guaranteed market quotas in the United States but have still done well in generating new avenues of employment and export with every little official assistance. A society which neglects the hardworking poor, whilst rewarding a largely indolent affluent class prospering under aid financed state patronage can hardly expect to realise sustained growth, become self-reliant or indeed be taken seriously as an agent of development either by its own people or in the international community. If we keep this above perspective in mind as the rationale for poverty alleviation strategy in mind then the following agenda for immediate action may appear both more urgent and relevant for our development priorities in the 1990s.

We are pleased to announce that an eminent economist of Bangladesh, Prof. Rehman Sobhan, now joins the rank of guest columnists of The Daily Star. A former director and now a fellow of the Bangladesh Institute for Development Studies (BIDS), Prof. Sobhan served as a member of the first Planning Commission of Bangladesh and, some 20 years later, was appointed as an Adviser to the Interim Government of the Acting President of Bangladesh, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed. Prof. Sobhan will be writing two separate columns for this Star: 'Policy Issues' and somewhat more reflective pieces under the title 'In My View'.

New US Nuclear Weapons Strategy Threatens Third World

WASHINGTON: The administration of US President George Bush is considering adopting a new nuclear weapons strategy that could include targeting non-nuclear nations in the Third World, according to new reports here.

The strategy, prepared by a high-ranking group from the US defence department, also urges Washington to cut its strategic nuclear arsenal far beyond limits set by 1991's Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START).

It suggests retaining about 5,000 nuclear weapons — roughly half of what it has today, but substantially more than the 1,500 nuclear arms which France, Britain and China and believed to be holding.

The strategy, particularly those parts which deal with targeting non-nuclear states — is likely to fuel a public controversy over US security requirements in the post-Cold War era, when Washington's chief adversary for almost 50 years no longer exists.

Accounts of the classified report appeared recently in Washington Post and Los Angeles Times newspapers, and also appeared in December 1991 in a Pentagon

publication, inside the Army, in an article entitled, 'The role of nuclear weapons in a new world order'.

The core elements of the proposed strategy consists of retaining a smaller strategic nuclear force targeted against 'every reasonable adversary' in the world. It also proposes creating a 'nuclear expeditionary force' which could be used against Third World targets suspected of developing weapons of mass destruction or engaging in hostile actions against Washington, according to published accounts.

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A new nuclear weapons strategy has been proposed in the US which may add non-nuclear Third World nations to its list of potential targets.

democracy and freedom fails'. The report is especially notable for the depiction of the Third World, as a source of continuing 'threats to the United States'.

'The Third World', the report says, 'is the scene of almost continuous violence at varying levels of intensity. It is divided into regions where long-standing animosities, simmering resentment toward the wealthier parts of the global community, personal ambitions of autocratic rulers, and the chronic absence of domestic constraints on aggressive behaviour frequently erupt into violent conflicts. The proliferation of advanced weapons to Third World militaries adds to the power-keg atmosphere'.

The report paints a similar picture of China during leadership succession struggles and of parts of the former Soviet Union, which 'could disintegrate into prolonged, brutal, internal conflicts like those seen in Lebanon (or) Yugoslavia'.

The post quotes the report as saying that 'in the absence of a credible nuclear deterrent extended by the United States, Germany and Japan may, in the future, opt for a nuclear option of their own, despite to be prohibitions and inhibitions'.

Failure to maintain US nuclear domination could spur proliferation, it argues. 'If the United States moves from superpower to being an equal, others may decide to become equals as well', says the transcript of briefing reportedly given by the senior air-force officer, who authored the report.

The notion that the new targeting strategy may discourage proliferation has been attacked by independent analysts here.

Dan Horner, acting director of the Washington-based Nuclear Control Institute, told IPS that such a theory is 'not supported either by historical precedent or by logic'. He

noted that regional nuclear arms races in the Middle East and South Asia were justified in each of the countries involved by citing the nuclear threat posed by the other.

Some countries might

think that being a nuclear target is a good reason to get nuclear weapons: said David Johnson of the Centre for Defence Information (CDI) here. — THIRD WORLD NETWORK FEATURES / IPS

OPINION

Nagorno-Karabakh

I wish to bring to your attention the tragic situation in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. Since 1988 an undeclared war is being waged against Azerbaijan by Armenia with a clearly stated goal: annexation of Karabakh to Armenia. Up to now the only result was sufferings of thousands of people, mass killings and unbelievable atrocities as reported by the international media following the massacres perpetrated by Armenian forces in the Azeri town to Khojaly on February 25-26.

The present crisis and fighting in an around Karabakh threatens the security of the Caucasus region as well as the peace and stability of the world. According to the reports we receive, Armenians have spread their attacks on towns and villages outside of Nagorno-Karabakh as well and thus created a very dangerous atmosphere for the whole of the region. This can only lead to an all-out war between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

It should be best in mind that throughout the history these territories have never been under Armenian rule. Nagorno-Karabakh has always been an Azerbaijani territory and recognised as such in the decisions of the CSCE adopted on February 28 and March 14 1992. That's the reason why Armenia now denies its expansionist aims and tries to hide them behind the principle of self-determination.

In fact, Armenia always based its territorial claims in the past on dubious historical rights, a concept reminiscent of the darkest days of humanity in the most recent history. The last tactical manoeuvre cannot therefore veil the true nature of the Karabakh dispute. As they state themselves 'it hinges on one word: nationalism' and their demand was 'an irredentist demand' from the outset. This extremist conception of nationalism leads Armenians throughout the world to a collective folly.

All forms of extremism cause great sufferings not only to the victims but also to the perpetrators and history is full of lessons in this respect. Actually, it is a fact that better armed and equipped

Armenians gained military and territorial advantages in Nagorno-Karabakh. But it should not be forgotten that peace cannot be built on military achievements and bloodshed. The use of force creates more problems than it solves. Therefore, Armenia should be deterred by all peace-loving nations and be convinced not to repeat the errors of the past.

Giving support to such a policy will only result in harming the interests of the Armenians rather than doing good to them. Should the Armenians continue to rely on the use of force to achieve their aims with the assistance they receive from abroad, a true and lasting peace will never be reached in the region. Such an approach would also wipe out chances of establishing good relations with Turkey and result in locking up themselves in their own geographical location. Armenians and friends of Armenia should be helped to realise that Turkish people, already moved by the recent atrocities committed against their brothers in Karabakh, cannot take a neutral stance in face of an all-out Armenian aggression in the region.

We warmly welcome the decision taken by the CSCE to convene a Peace Conference in the near future. Turkey would welcome any effort in promoting peace and security in the region. In fact, it is the Armenian will which will decide the future of relationships in the region. If they abandon irredentist aggression and wish to open-up a new era of good relations, the Turkish nation will be ready to cooperate with them to build a better future for new generations.

With these feelings I would like to appeal to you to use your influence and good offices, at all possible levels, to persuade Armenians not to seek military advantages and prefer a peaceful settlement.

Ali Dincer, MP
Head of Foreign Affairs Committee
The Turkish Grand National Assembly
Ankara, Turkey.

To the Editor...

Burgeoning crimes and the police

Sir, It is easily understandable to all that poverty, unemployment and uncertainty about future are at the core reasons for social unrest, untoward incidents, lawlessness and anarchy. The aforesaid causes, have, undoubtedly, given rise to widespread corruption in various forms and dimensions.

The reports published in the dailies and other periodicals regarding mugging and snatching including threats to life and property in other forms confirm the steady spilling crimes. We the general masses feel helpless and hapless under the circumstances prevailing in the country including the Metropolitan Dhaka city. Presumably, the tremendous expenditure made in maintaining the law enforcing agencies of the country is as bad as putting money in water. One should not forget that the masses in general and the income-tax-payers in particular shoulder the said expenditure and as such they have an established right to security of their lives and properties.

Allegedly, the incidents are happening just under the noses of the police personnel

who often just look on, and seldom come forward to rescue the victims. On the other hand, it is also reported that when the criminals are caught by the passers-by and are likely to face stern punishment, the police promptly step in to arrest (rather to save) the criminals. As a result, specially, our womenfolk feel very insecure to go out of their houses.

The question is 'how long can this be allowed to continue?'

Our queries regarding the role of our political representatives, brilliant bureaucrats and other concerned authorities are growing alarmingly terrible as under:

a) What role is being played by the public representatives of the parliament? Are they conscious of their commitments and responsibilities to the nation? Do they ever try to make self-assessment of what they have done for the people beside their personal interests?

b) Do the supreme commanders of our law enforcing agencies ever take interest to go through the various reports of lawlessness published in the dailies and other papers? If so, what actions are being taken to contain the crimes?

c) What does the concerned ministry do?

The whole nation is anxiously looking forward to some concrete responses from the concerned authorities.

Jerome Sarkar
Shingtola, Dhaka.

Right to choice

Sir, It was with great interest that I read the letter of the 'bideshi' in your daily, of 17th March, under the heading 'An Irish Tragedy'.

Apparently, the 'bideshi' has totally misunderstood the moral behind the editorial in your paper of Feb 26. Nowhere do you imply that the 'weakest' do not deserve our concern; you only advocate the right to choice of a victim, victimised due to no fault of hers. Abortion is a crime, and none can support it. But the right to terminate a pregnancy resulting from a rape, is certainly not propagating the abortionist cause. You have only propagated honouring the right to practise the right to choice. The 'bideshi' is advocating a hypocritical situation: your outrage is not at the aborting but at the denial of a choice to a rape victim. And the Irish government should certainly first stop the crime of rape before trying to stop the crime of abortion, resulting from the

rape. The logic of the 'bideshi' seems to be elusive; the logic of The Daily Star is clear.

Parveen Haque
Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

Passengers suffer

Sir, In spite of the government's repeated announcement over TV and other news media that sufficient arrangements had been made for travel during Eid holidays I was shocked to see the state of affairs at the Sadarghat Launch Terminal. While passengers stuffed themselves like sardines in a tin can' and quite a few overflowing onto the roof tops, a good number of vessels were seen lying idle moored on the opposite bank. It is a well-known fact that certain influential owners in collusion with BIWTA officials make only a limited number of vessels available during peak hours to reap maximum benefit at the cost of much discomfort to passengers. Many newspapers displayed pictures of such overcrowding and it seemed no different from other years. Will the concerned government agencies kindly explain the cause and reasons for such lapses?

P. Rasheed,
Uttara, Dhaka.