

Paris Meeting

Bangladesh has reasons to be satisfied with the outcome of the aid consortium meeting, just held in Paris, which has pledged \$2.2b for the fiscal year 1992-93. According to Finance Minister Saifur Rahman, this is slightly more than what Bangladesh had sought, said to be \$2.15 b from the consortium. A breakdown released from the French capital on Wednesday showed that the project aid would cover \$ 1.4 b to \$ 1.5 b and the rest would relate to aid for commodities and food. As expected, the amount pledged in Paris does not include \$600 m recently promised for flood protection plan nor does it cover the international assistance for relief and rehabilitation of refugees from Myanmar.

On the face of it, there appears to be no appreciable decline as such in the volume of aid offered by the Paris Club to Bangladesh. However, there were strong indications before and during the meeting that the size of the assistance would not increase over the years to come — in fact, it should probably decrease by stages — even taking into account the inflationary pressure on development. However, the authorities here cannot complain over such prospects, since it is the policy of the government to reduce the country's dependence on external aid, to rely more on investment than on outright assistance and to set up more private sector-based industries to replace aid-oriented public sector ventures.

At this stage, it is also important to put the outcome of the Paris meeting in another perspective. We must bear in mind that a pledge made during a consortium conference should not be confused for a firm commitment which comes later on the basis of a specific project proposal and on the availability of local currency component of the cost. Our past experience has shown again and again that the disbursement of funds can fall considerably behind the target, often due to the slow rate of implementation of the project in question.

In the case of the situation in Bangladesh today, it is rendered further difficult by the poor performance of the administration in a number of areas, which figured prominently in a series of criticisms made by representatives of donor nations and aid agencies at the Paris meeting. In this context, the point made by the representative of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that there has been stagnation in the reform process in the privatisation of public enterprises and in the reduction of losses in state-run ventures seems as valid as the criticism of the World Bank (WB) economist that "bad management and corrupt practices" are part of several public sector corporations, especially the Power Development Board (PDB).

There is little doubt that during the year ahead the administration will be under increasing pressure to hasten its reform process. It will also be advised, perhaps less openly, to sort out its political difficulties and, with understanding from the opposition give a new momentum to the development process. We do not necessarily agree with all the conditionalities insisted on by aid agencies. In many cases, they tend to disregard constraints faced by a democratically elected government. But we do feel that the government must indeed perform better than what it has done so far to deserve what is undoubtedly a massive aid from outside.

A Fair Deal to Foresters

This had to happen some day. And it has happened. We talk incessantly of our receding forest line and fast-dwindling green coverage of our country and of the tremendous strain a booming population and industrialisation are subjecting all life-supporting systems of nature. And we have hardly as yet taken any tangible measures to arrest the plundering of the forestlands.

Take the case of the reserve forests, so called because they are specially protected by law against molestation. Yes, protected these are but only by the books of statutes — and not by any enforcing agency designed to cope with the mounting challenge of vandals and poachers, the local big bullies that live around the forests and eat up steadily their wealth but their area as well — steadily over decades and decades.

Some people called security personnel are there at the forest site offices who are supposed to patrol their area regularly. How would they do it — on foot? And how many people are engaged to ensure the security of how big an area? The ratio is better left unsaid. And how are they equipped to cope with the trespassing thieves and goons, coming in bands and fully armed? They are expected to stave them off without as much as a staff.

Such circumstances have naturally pushed the forest rangers and specially the forest security personnel to come to terms with reality and strike up a kind of co-existence with all kinds of killers of forest — barring of course very honourable cases of exception. This less than desirable complementarity between the keeper and the violator thrives well within a system where the rot starts well above the field staff level. The pervading outlook is that the forest is there for all to loot — the people appointed to preserve it enjoying the divine right to practice that altitude but the plundering criminals making the best of the height all the time. How came it to be a subject of such criminal neglect and corruption? Through the successive governments' failing to appreciate the importance of the forests as the true lifeline of this land and its people and acting on it.

The situation being so hopeless, one was surprised to read in Thursday's The Daily Star that eight forest officials were beaten up in the Kaptai area by timber thieves and their henchmen after the former had seized a truck-carrying stolen timber. Three of the injured are still in hospital — but we say bravo! to all eight of them. Billions of Taka worth forest wealth is systematically looted every year and very little of that crime faces any real resistance from anywhere. The forest establishment is simply not any match for the challenge both in size and strength. Whatever little it protects, it does that morally, through a moral commitment to do so. While saluting these few, we would like government to change its approach to the forest question very radically. Give them men, give them money, do away with pockets of habitation inside reserve areas, declare without anymore dilly dallying the Dhaka-Mymensing forest as a reserve one. Put the whole thing way above the perch it now occupies in our national priorities.

Americans Look to Japan for Another Cold War

Kevin J Kelley writes from Washington

Now the Cold War threat from the Soviet Union is past, Americans are looking warily across the Pacific at what some perceive as a very real threat from Japan. Some believe the Japanese are trying to dominate their country, "weaving themselves into the fabric of American life," through an economic takeover. It may be a paranoid suggestion but paranoia can begin another Cold War.

POWERFUL political and economic interests in the United States are in the process of fomenting what might become known as Cold War II.

The new enemy is not a communist military behemoth vowing to bury the US. This time, the enemy is said to be imperiled by a capitalist, lightly armed state that has been a close ally of Washington for 45 years.

Despite the absence of a nuclear threat and a hostile ideology, Japan is being depicted as an evil empire intent on building, in George Bush's words "an iron curtain of protectionism."

The campaign to demonise Japan is not a new phenomenon. Efforts have been underway for years to substitute Tokyo for Moscow as the locus of an anti-American conspiracy.

Beginning in the mid-Eighties, opinion polls in the US detected increasing sentiment that economic competition, rather than military confrontation, would be the key determinant of the country's future. At the same time, surveys found a growing belief that Japan, not the Soviet Union, would become the main challenger to US global hegemony.

The expansion of Japanese economic might during the past decade became vividly apparent to Americans. Tokyo-based conglomerates acquired controlling shares in such US landmarks as New York's Rockefeller Center and Hollywood's Columbia Pictures studios. At the same time, Honda was becoming the most popular make of car in the US.

But this longstanding unease in regard to Japan's

achievements has recently taken an ominous turn.

A national sense of suspicion and concern is giving way to a mood of hearted and panic, as the US pop culture industry and some prominent intellectuals and politicians strive to present Japan as a monstrous menace to the American way of life.

A turning point came in early January when President George Bush travelled to Tokyo for his postponed summit meeting with Prime Minister Kichii Miyazawa.

Reacting to domestic political pressures, Bush shifted the focus of the talks from a diplomatic session devoted to

post-Cold War strategy to a trade-bargaining encounter, casting the US as the weaker and aggrieved party.

When the president fainted and vomited at a dinner party, many commentators back home were quick to interpret the incident as symbolic of a prostrate and ailing US.

While Bush conceded that all his aims had not been met at the Tokyo summit, he argued that significant progress had been made in defending the beleaguered US economy against Japan's aggressive trade policies. Bush also urged understanding of the importance of preserving good relations with Japan.

Recently, considerable media attention has been paid to Rising Sun, a new novel by best-selling suspense author Michael Crichton. His tale portrays an insidious Japanese takeover of major US businesses and institutions, including sections of the police, media and federal government.

With a paranoia reminiscent of the early days of the first Cold War, one of Crichton's characters says of the Japanese: "They are weaving themselves into the fabric of American life, and they are slowly taking control."

Rising Sun is but the latest in a series of books, mostly non-fiction, that warn of a nefarious Japanese plan to rule the world. They have titles like In the Shadow of the Rising Sun, and The Coming War with Japan.

These authors belong to a new school of US policy analysts who view Japan not as a difficult ally, but instead as a country utterly and irreconcilably different from the US in fundamental ways. Because Japanese business leaders are intent on dominating every other nation, these revisionists argue, it would be a fatal mistake to treat Japan as just another capitalist competitor.

This type of reasoning infuses a study recently commissioned by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). "Japan is an economic su-

perpower," the study reads, "whose world dominance appears inescapable and incontrovertible. (In the absence of) some dramatic unified re-assertion of Western intent coupled with an equally dramatic economic resurgence."

Mainstream Japanese are creatures of an ageless, amoral, manipulative and controlling culture — not to be emulated — suited only to this race, in this place."

Some commentators have begun to express alarm at such volatile language. It is being recalled for example, that more than 100,000 Japanese-Americans were placed in detention camps during World War Two, in one of this country's most wholesale violations of US civil liberty standards.

To a certain extent, the onset of Cold War II is being facilitated by some Japanese themselves. The anti-Japan uproar in the US reached a crescendo when Miyazawa and another prominent Japanese politician made remarks during the past month that questioned the competence and intelligence of US workers.

As the sabre-rattling gets louder a number of voices in the US are being raised in appeal for tolerance and restraint.

Pundits trying to prevent a new Cold War are arguing that Japan is being cast as a scapegoat for economic failures

made in the US. They also note that the balance-of-payments deficit between the two countries — the US owed Japan \$39 billion in 1991 — is actually much smaller than a few years ago.

It would be nothing short of suicidal for either nation to engage in outright economic and political hostilities, these moderates maintain.

Japan is the Number Two trading partner of the US, accounting for more than \$4 billion of American exports last November alone. One-third of all Japanese exports — close to \$6 billion worth in the same month — are destined for the US market.

The two countries are also tightly linked by a 32-year-old defence agreement, supported strongly by most of Japan's Asian neighbours.

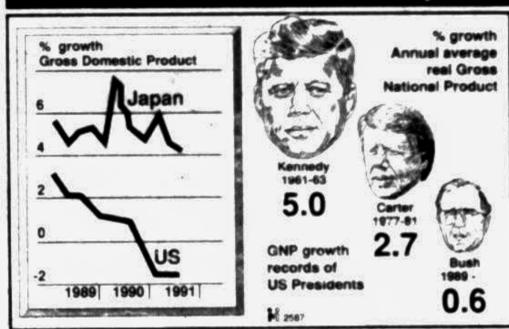
To maintain the conditions that made them the two richest nations on earth, said a front page analysis in the Washington Post last December, "America needs Japan and Japan needs America."

These conditions are no doubt uppermost in Bush's mind, and they continue to define US policy toward Japan. But domestic political factors can and do exert a heavy influence on many facets of US foreign policy, sometimes even outweighing the most pragmatic economic imperatives.

There is thus a real possibility that the swelling anti-Japan hysteria among sections of the US public could eventually force political leaders to acquiesce to the coming of Cold War II. — GEMINI NEWS

KEVIN J KELLEY is an American freelance journalist, and editor of the Toward Freedom Journal.

Fall and fall of the US economy



Arrested Arab Teenagers Tortured in Israel Jails

Mounir B. Abboud writes from Beiput

ARAB teenagers describe being hooded and handcuffed for long periods, beaten with riot sticks on their feet and genitals or locked for hours in a small cupboard.

For these teenagers, the intifada uprising has finally caught up with them.

Palestinian youngsters are at the core of street protests against Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, often clashing with Israeli troops. Arrested for rock-throwing and other alleged offences, the teenagers are jailed for up to one year. More than half of those mentioned in a report by a human rights group were eventually released without charges.

Reports detail allegations that Palestinian teenagers are tortured in Israeli prisons and accuse Israel of exercising a policy of arbitrary arrest of minors.

"We are alleging a systematic policy of abusing children accused of security offences, involving both torture and

intimidation. Children are interrogated in the same way as adults," said Omar Yassin, author of a report by Law in the Service of Man.

The organisation, founded by Palestinian lawyers, is an affiliate of the Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists. Since 1987 it has collected 25 affidavits and 77 questionnaires from minors aged 13-17 alleging abuse and torture in jails in the occupied West Bank.

A second report, by Rev George Owaida, an Anglican priest from Jerusalem, and three American human-rights volunteers, contains statements from 20 minors, aged 12-17 alleging "systematic intimidation, humiliation and excessive physical abuse, including torture".

Both reports criticised an Israeli army regulation that bans detainees, including minors, from contacting relatives or lawyers for up to 18 days unless they agree to sign a confession.

"They generally force some

sort of confession out of these people," said Mr Yassin who served two years in prison after being convicted of belonging to a Palestinian guerrilla faction.

Kamal Hamdan, 16, who was jailed in a prison near the West Bank city of Nablus, said he was confined in a one-metre-wide cupboard for four days. "It stank of excrement and urine on the floor. I sat, handcuffed and hooded," he said in a five-page affidavit.

Mr Hamdan described 12 days of interrogation lasting up to two hours before he was released without charges. In one session, he said, he was handcuffed to a chair while one interrogator beat him on the genitals and another jumped on his handcuffed wrists. Ugly brown scars on his wrists at-

tested to Mr Hamdan's ordeal.

Marwan Jarrah, 17, said he was praying in a mosque in Gaza City when soldiers burst in, clubbed him with riot sticks and arrested on suspicion of throwing rocks during an anti-Israeli demonstration.

During three months in prison, Mr Jarrah said he was beaten on the stomach with truncheons until blood spewed from his mouth, subjected to ice-cold showers, deprived of sleep and intimidated into signing a confession despite his claims of innocence.

Mr Jarrah said a cucumber was shoved in his rectum. Afterwards he was forced to eat the cucumber. He said abuses at the prison were committed by the same five or six soldiers who frequently forced him to spend nights

outdoors, handcuffed to a post.

Palestinian lawyers contend that most Israeli soldiers who abused Arab youths in prison are not punished. "Abuses are winked at all along the line. The soldiers know they will not be punished for this kind of abusive behaviour," said Hashem Al Badr, a Palestinian lawyer who represented many of the 800 minors that the Gaza Bar Association estimated were jailed in the Gaza Strip within five months in 1992.

Things are not better for other Palestinians, too. In the Gaza Strip, 60 per cent of the inhabitants are living under "temporary condition." But most of them have been residents of the area since 1948.

In the West Bank, a lot of refugees live in very crowded accommodations, with six to seven people in a room. They are not allowed to enlarge their houses even if space is available. There are no municipal services like garbage collection. Because of open sewers all over the camps, infections have spread.

Even academic freedom is no exception from harassment. Universities, for example, need permits to construct new buildings, buy books and equipment and receive donation. These permits are given at a very slow pace, or not at all, without any explanation.

Unlike Jewish schools, Palestinian universities cannot receive Arabic books on physics or chemistry. Even if they did receive books as a donation, the Israelis impose very high taxes before the books are released.

Professors who do not possess an Israeli identification card have to sign a loyalty oath condemning the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) as a "terrorist organisation." Those who refuse are expelled from their universities.

Most student leaders are also either in jail or under "administrative detention," which is the same. Other students face house arrests or prevented from leaving their towns.

— Depthnews Asia

China

Boomtown Becomes Migrant Magnet

The economic boom in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong is attracting a record influx of migrants from all over China. Yojana Sharma of IPS reports from Guangzhou, China.

comes especially heavy at the end of the traditional Chinese Lunar New Year holidays in February. Most are friends and relatives of those visiting from their jobs in Guangdong who had regaled them with tales of abundant consumer goods and high salaries in the city's booming factories.

More and more Hong Kong factories are moving to Guangdong, where labour is cheap, creating a construction boom and demand for unskilled labour.

Provincial authorities say the migrant influx this year has been higher than usual, despite preemptive measures taken in December to regulate the hiring of labourers from other parts of the country.

The regulations included a strict contract system. Migrants may not work in

Guangdong without an employment contract approved by the authorities and enterprises are banned from hiring them.

Analysts say the larger-than-usual number of migrants in Febma may have been partly caused by the visit of Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping to the province in January during which he praised the success of the open-door economic policy and promised more reforms to fuel prosperity.

Deng's remarks to build more "Hong Kongs of the south" struck a chord, particu-

larly since they were carried by word of mouth rather than reported in the official press.

"Somehow, for these people, that carried more weight," said one political analyst. "Because it had not been reported officially outside the south, it had to be true."

Observers said the huge influx could also be due to last summer's devastating floods which ravaged much of China's farmlands. Thousands of farmers were left homeless and many farms destroyed creating a large army of drifters willing

try their luck in the cities.

Even before the floods, the Chinese government reported an unemployment rate of around three per cent of some 18 million people, many of whom have nothing to lose by travelling to Guangdong.

Guangzhou now increasingly resembles a gold rush frontier town and the provincial government is having problems maintaining order in a city that cannot possibly absorb arrivals of 100,000 a day.

The authorities at first tried to exhort migrants to return home, announcing through loudspeakers outside the train station that there were no jobs to be had. When that failed, they attempted to keep people moving, laying on a fleet of buses to carry them to other cities in the prosperous Pearl River delta.

But these bus rides more often than not turn out to be a journey to nowhere.

In nearby Dongguan on the Pearl River, city authorities have stepped up inspections in factories attempting attempt to bring in workers without approved contracts.

Four special police units have been formed to inspect arriving vehicles and persuade the workers to return home.

The provincial government believes less than 20,000 of the newcomers will find jobs. Others will become prey to unscrupulous middlemen who demand a commission to place migrants in jobs in other cities in the Pearl River region.

The rest will hand around for several weeks until their resources run out before returning home.

Said an 18-year-old girl from Henan province after spending nearly three weeks camping out in Guangzhou: "I'm going home because I was not lucky this time to find a job. But I am hopeful if I come again next year I might be lucky."

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.

Security

Sir, They came, they looted, they left. It was on April Fool day; but the gunmen were for real. They were not fooling any body, least of all the shopkeepers and the customers, who were their victims. Never before in the history of this nation has such an audacious dacoity taken place. But the way things are going, this might only be the beginning of such incidents. But what perhaps interests us most, is not the dacoity itself, at a peak hour, when normal people like ourselves are stuck for hours on end in the perpetual jam on

the Hattirpool road, the venue of the darning dacoity; it is the total nonchalance of the concerned authorities. Authorities which include the IGP, the Home Minister and the Home Secretary. The police arrived but naturally 'just after' the dacoits had left. Their timing is always perfect. Somehow, and of course it has never occurred to either the IGP or the Home Minister or the Home Secretary, to offer to resign, in the wake of such a shameful incident in the heart of the city. But then, it does not occur to them to resign for much more serious things.

I would like the Home

Minister, the elected representatives of the people to answer only one simple question, and that is, whether they can give us an example, of one civilized nation of the world, where the banks are closed for five days? In a country, where the authorities guarantee the basic bare minimum security to the citizens who are held hostage in the hands of the bandits, how can the government even suggest that the banks remain shut for five days? What sort of cheap popularity are they trying to attain, and at whose expense? Admittedly, the 'powers that be' did wake up and order a few banks to open on one day in between, to 'facilitate' the 'business community' but apparently the clever pundits failed to realize, that you could only utilize the services of these banks, if you had an account there. What about people who did not have accounts at these banks or the branches which were to remain open?

Or was the police prepared to give protection to the general population?

It is time the government considered giving arms to the innocent citizens to protect themselves as the police and the government itself have failed so miserably to give protection to the population at large. The govt. is the sole owner of arms. How is it every thus has an arsenal tucked away? So perhaps it is now high time the 'honourable men' started to consider giving licensed arms to the peace loving citizens to protect themselves and his property.

Let us see the elected representatives, take some steps to improve the law and order situation, now that they have done with the basics, like raising their own pay, etc. etc.

Parveen Haque
D.O.H.S, Dhaka Cantt.

Misplaced kindness

Sir, Allowing excessive rickshaws to ply on the overcrowded streets is misplaced kindness. It is a bad precedent, and not at all in public interest. Ultimately the administration would be put under great strain when handling 'misplaced kindness' cases in the other sectors.

It is time to discard this philosophy once for all. We still have to learn to be tough — and cool.

A. Mawaz
Dhaka

Neil Kinnock

Sir, I am shocked to learn the news that Neil Kinnock resigned as the Leader of the British Labour Party after he had failed for a second time to unseat the Conservative government in the recently held

general election. I do appreciate Mr Kinnock's democratic values. In my opinion, a change was essential in the ruling party in Britain.

However, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to the Conservatives on their win. We hope that under the able and dynamic leadership of Prime Minister John Major, his party and government will ensure further welfare and development for the people of Britain, irrespective of race and culture, and will also contribute in international development and in promoting peace.

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