

## The Fatikchhari Killings

There is no end, it seems, to the lawlessness, terrorism and sequence of murders in Chittagong. Less than two months after four Awami League workers were mowed down in broad daylight in Hathazari, three members of the Bangladesh Chhatra League were shot dead Friday last in the adjacent upazila of Fatikchhari during a party conference. In both cases, the attacks bore all the hallmarks of careful planning and ruthless, cold-blooded execution. Both incidents were characterised by a total lack of government authority, as the police was conspicuous by its absence. Both these acts of murders were politically-motivated and part of a systematic campaign to terrorise the region.

According to information gathered from the press and local observers, there are strong reasons to suspect that both the outrages may have been committed by armed cadres of the Jamaat-e-Islami in cooperation with those of the National Democratic Party (NDP). Reports from the area also suggest that the terrorists often use halls of residence of Chittagong University, which has been under effective Jamaat 'occupation' since December, 1990, as bases. Evidence, as demonstrated by Friday's incident, proves that the murderers operate with impunity, moving in large, heavily-armed groups with little or no interference from the police (it is no longer credible to refer to the police as a 'law and order' enforcement agency, because those two attributes of a civilised society seem to be no longer their in the upazilas around Chittagong city and University). This situation exists despite a flood of sermons delivered by government leaders, including the Prime Minister, during the past several months.

The evidence from Fatikchhari bring into question whether the government has the political will to establish rule of law in that region. Worse, there does not seem to be anybody in government willing to stand up and take responsibility, even though the minister of home affairs would be the obvious person to be held accountable for a breakdown of law and order in any part of the country. Furthermore, in a parliamentary system like ours, the prime minister, as the head of government, would have to bear the final responsibility for failure of government in any sphere of public life.

What we currently have in Chittagong is a demonstration of incapacity of the government to protect public life. In addition, since the reign of terror is politically-motivated, the government is also failing to ensure freedom of thought and exercise of democratic rights for its citizens. Responsibility for failures of such magnitude cannot simply be dumped on the Officer-in-Charge of Fatikchhari police station. The OC may well point at the lack of direction from the chain of command, through the Superintendent of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong district, to the Inspector General of Police in Dhaka and finally the Minister of Home Affairs.

Yet the situation has gone so far, that mere apportioning of blame is no longer enough to arrest the slide towards anarchy. Unless there is a visible and effective move on the part of the Home Ministry and the police to act against the killers of Fatikchhari, Hathazari, Rauzan etc. there will remain the grave danger that the public may develop serious doubt about the efficacy of the system altogether, particularly in the ability and will of the government to ensure security and democratic rights for all. That is a situation that must be avoided, not only for the safety and well-being of the people of Chittagong, but also for the future of democracy in the country as a whole. The government can only restore public confidence by bringing the terrorists and also their political masters to book, no matter who they may be. It is not entirely unjustified for ministers to give lectures to the people about their civic responsibilities, but the people also have to feel the effectiveness of government in order to take the sermons seriously.

## Happy Ending, Hopefully

There are many things that can and do go wrong with our citizens trying to find employment abroad. The first hurdle they need to cross is to find a genuine employment agent. Then starts the near impossible task of finding a suitable job and getting selected for it. This is followed by a mad scramble to find money to pay for the ticket, for all the formalities and, of course, for the agent's fee. The ordeal does not end there. The possibility that after all this effort, the visas they are given may turn out to be false, is something they can never be sure of until they actually arrive at the place of employment.

Now, however, another pitfall has been added to the long list. According to a Star report of 9 May, 140 Bangladeshis have been flown back from Jeddah airport, immediately after arrival, because of a mistake in the Saudi visa caused by the Embassy in Dhaka. The story has it that the rubber stamp used in the visa by the consular section of the Saudi Embassy here was an old one, not registered with the immigration office in Jeddah and one in which 'Dhaka' was spelt as 'Dacca'. Visa fraud being not unknown in this route, the Jeddah immigration authority immediately deported those employment seeking passengers, without bothering to verify the whole thing through either telex, fax, telephone or a special courier. Instead, they were immediately flown back.

The situation now is that Biman wants the local recruiting agent to pay for the Jeddah-Dhaka return ticket costing Tk 23,040 per passenger. This is not the end of the story. After the regularisation of their visas, the 140 employment seekers, will have to be flown back to Jeddah, which will be another Tk 23,040 each.

It is a clear case of one man's mistake causing havoc to someone else. The mistake committed by the consular section of the Saudi Embassy in Dhaka, has caused tremendous hardship to a group of innocent people. The recruiting agent has appealed to the Saudi authorities, and it has been gathered that Saudi Embassy is trying their best to take back these Bangladeshis at their cost. We commend the Saudi Embassy for their initiative, which we hope will be implemented with the minimum of delay.

In the meantime, the Saudi Embassy should investigate how this mistake could have occurred leading to the deportation — we expect it to be temporary — of 140 Bangladeshis and take measures so that its recurrence is prevented.

CONTINUING differences between industrialised and Third World countries are threatening the success of the 'Earth Summit' to be held in June in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

These differences dominated the five weeks of the fourth preparatory committee (Prepcom 4) meeting held 2 March - 3 April in New York. The outcome was generally disappointing for the South, as the key issues of its getting access to extra financial resources and environmentally-sound technology were unresolved and have to 'taken to Rio' for the heads of governments and states to find solutions, if any.

The meeting did make substantial progress in agreeing to programmes in some specific environmental areas such as combating desertification and promoting sustainable agriculture. It also produced a draft of a Rio Declaration on environment and development.

But Southern governments remain discouraged by the lack of political will in the North, and especially the US, to commit itself not only to funding the programmes but to a new global partnership in which the South can be given a more effective say.

The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) process has however proved useful in bringing North and South together in frank dialogue. Such discussions, sometimes emotionally heated, have been rare since the decline of North-South communications, in the decade of the 1980s.

Much is at stake, for UNCED is expected to come up with agreements on a wide range of complex and important issues that could well set the framework for international relations in general (and North-South relations in particular) for many years to come.

Although the original North-inspired idea was to have the Earth summit focus on global environmental problems (to mark the 20th anniversary of the 1972 Stockholm environment meeting), South countries insisted that it should equally discuss development issues.

And rightly so: in a world where incomes are so unequally distributed, it would be impossible to solve environmental problems without simultaneously tackling the development issues of poverty, basic needs fulfillment and external debt reduction.

Indeed, at the Prepcom meetings in the past year,

## EARTH SUMMIT

# Debate Over 'Rio Declaration' Could Begin New North-South Dialogue

by Martin Khor

*North-South differences, as expected, dominated the last inter-governmental meeting preparing for June's Earth Summit. Although the meeting did not produce agreement on core issues such as financial aid and technology transfer, a useful dialogue on the crucial Rio Declaration resulted in a draft generally favourable to the South.*

*This is the first article in a special three-part series on UNCED by the author who attended its preparatory committee meet in New York. The second part will appear tomorrow.*

there has been little argument over the fact that the world faces an increasingly alarming environment crisis, and that drastic measures are needed to reverse the trend. Climate change, ozone layer loss, desertification, water pollution, deforestation, air pollution and so on are widely accepted as serious problems threatening Earth's survival.

It is also agreed that the ecology crisis is linked to 'unsustainable patterns of consumption and production' (in UNCED jargon) and that these patterns must now change so as to attain 'sustainable development'.

The raging controversies of UNCED lie rather in where the necessary changes will take place, who will bear the cost of transition, and what is the real meaning and implications of 'sustainable development'. These form the heart of North-South differences in approach towards UNCED.

If the environment crisis is linked to economic patterns, then there have to be changes in economic, technological and even cultural behaviour in tackling the crisis. For instance, there should be less energy use overall, a switch to environmentally sounder technology, less deforestation. The crucial question is, how will the burden be shared between and within countries of economically adjusting to ecologically sound patterns of production and consumption?

South countries have been arguing in the Prepcom meetings that the North is historically (and presently) primarily responsible for depleting and polluting the world's resources and should therefore take a correspondingly major responsibility in bearing the costs of adjustment. This implies that the North must commit itself to changing its own production and consumption patterns and reduce its wasteful use of

world resources, as well as help the South to change to ecologically-friendly development models.

Southern countries are afraid that if the North does not accept its responsibilities, it would put the onus of blame on the South instead, and make use of 'environmental protection' as another instrument to further dictate the economic and social policies of developing countries. Already wrecked by external debt, low commodity prices, rising poverty and a host of aid and loan 'conditionalities' imposed by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and bilateral aid agencies, the South can ill afford to carry the main part of yet another economic burden.

That might well happen if, through UNCED and other fora, the North succeeds in defining 'sustainable development' as something that must be done in and to the South, whilst it can carry on its wasteful lifestyle and inappropriate production systems.

The South finds this unacceptable and argues that the North must instead cut down on its wasteful use of resources so that the South can have some 'environmental space' to develop out of poverty.

At the Prepcom 4 meeting this North-South clash of perceptions (and policy prescriptions) dominated the negotiations in several core areas, especially the 'Earth Charter' (remained the Rio Declaration, a statement of key environmental/development principles) and financial resources to implement UNCED's Agenda 21 (the comprehensive action programmes to be signed in Rio).

The Rio Declaration became the subject of the most intense intellectual and political debates between North and South throughout the five

weeks of the Prepcom 4 meeting. Its 27 principles, that will be the political basis for UNCED's other documents and follow-up activities, were finally agreed to practically in the meeting's last hours. However, changes can still be made at the Rio Summit and the debate could well reopen.

As the Prepcom chairman, Tommy Koh of Singapore, put it, the 27 principles 'form a very delicate balance as a package deal, and any attempt to amend any part of the declaration could unravel the whole package'.

The general acceptance of the Declaration draft (only Israel objected, to references to resources of people under occupation) can be considered a success for the South since the basic format and main principles put forward by the Group of 77 (representing developing countries) and China were finally accepted.

Originally the Northern countries wanted a short, poetic and inspirational Earth Charter stressing that we all live in 'one world' and it was everyone's duty to protect the environment.

The O-77-China however objected to the 'one world' concept, arguing that the causes and responsibilities for resolving environmental problems must be differentiated as between North and South.

This is an important point because although we may live in 'one world' biologically and environmentally, there are unfortunately at least two worlds: socially and economically, the worlds of the rich and the poor. Single-prescription policies (such as 'we must all consume less') are misleading and even unfair in this two-worlds situation. A doctor would ask a malnourished man to eat more and an obese person to eat less; a single-policy dictate for both to tighten their belts could cause the

poor man to starve to death, whilst the obese man may still be over-consuming.

The move towards 'sustainable development' must therefore first and foremost involve the cutting of wastage in the North, and not the curtailment of the South's right to development (although the pattern and quality of that development should be appropriately modified).

As the O-77 spokesman Tariq Hyder of Pakistan, put it at the Prepcom: 'We agree the environment is important, but the question is how we define and achieve sustainable development. A developed country with US\$18,000 per capita income annually might stabilise output at \$20,000 and call it sustainable'.

It may then tell Southern countries with \$300 per capita income that they are spoiling the world's resources. They should be given some aid for 'sustainable development' to bring them up to \$500 per capita and then ask that they remain at this level.

This kind of 'freezing' of incomes with such a wide North-South disparity was simply not acceptable, Hyder said. This was why the South insisted on differentiating the roles that North and South had to play.

Initially, Northern delegations strongly resisted what they saw as blame being placed on them for global environmental problems, and the United States could not accept the 'right to development' as a principle. Eventually, after weeks of long negotiating sessions, the Southern view prevailed, being incorporated in such areas of the draft declaration as:

• Principle 3: The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations.

• Principle 5, stating that poverty eradication is indispensable for sustainable development to decrease income disparities and meet the needs of the majority; and

• Principle 7: 'In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.'

The relative progress reached on the Rio Declaration saved the Prepcom from an otherwise embarrassing failure to reach accord on other key areas: financial resources, technology transfer, and many parts of Agenda 21 that are still in dispute. Prospects that two conventions (on biodiversity and climate change) will be ready for signing at the Rio Summit also look increasingly dim.

The debates over the Earth Charter/Rio Declaration have however been a valuable process: the South was able to co-ordinate and articulate its position and several Northern delegations were in the end able to accept some of the fundamental points.

The Prepcom discussions also more sharply clarified what sustainable development should be, and should not be. It should not be a tool used by a minority to maintain their economic privileges and protect wasteful lifestyles.

Sustainable development does not only mean that the present generation must conserve resources to allow future generations to meet their needs; it also means that the unsustainable consumption patterns of a minority should be altered so as to free resources that should be used to fulfil the needs of everyone in this generation itself as well as future generations.

Sustainable development thus requires both inter- and intra-generational equity as its cornerstone. Without the acceptance of this principle, it is difficult to see how international (or for that matter national) consensus can be reached to resolve environmental problems. — Third World Network Features

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# Why Did US Switch Lockerbie Blame to Libya?

by Heenan Bhatti

*Despite the imposition of UN sanctions, doubts that the Libyans were responsible for the Lockerbie airliner bombing persist even among the families of the victims. The doubts are based on the fact that for three years police inquiries led to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. And American attempts to blame Libya for terrorism have proved wrong in the past. Gemini News Service examines the case against Libya.*

In Britain and Turkey bombed Tripoli and Bakazi, in the belief that the Libyans were responsible for the atrocity.

It later emerged that an extremist German group was responsible. The American never apologised to the Libyan people. Now in the Lockerbie case a UN sanctions trade and travel embargo is being supported by talk of a possible military strike.

The evidence uncovered by the police inquiry pointing to the PFLP-GC connection is substantial. Its basis lies in PFLP-GC cells operating in Germany two months before the bombing, when the West German police arrested several PFLP-GC activists. Surprisingly, they were allowed to walk free because of 'lack of evidence'.

These activists had visited Malta where the bomb is believed to have been loaded and then transferred at Frankfurt airport on to Pan Am Flight 103.

The PFLP-GC link is further alluded to in a secret Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) report, which repeats the direction of the police inquiries. The planning of the bombing,

says the report, is believed to have been commissioned by radical Iranians led by Ali Akbar Mohteshemi as revenge for the shooting down of an Iranian passenger plane over the Gulf by an American warship in July 1988, killing 290 people.

As in the case of the 1986 bombing of Libya, the American failed to apologise. The report believes the two Libyans were low-level technicians in the operation.

The reason given for the switch to focussing sole blame onto the two Libyan suspects stems from the American claim to have two 'witnesses,' who they allege will give 'incontrovertible' evidence against the two men, none of which has been made public.

Critics of the American and British U-turn point to the political climate of the time. The Iraqis were becoming a powerful player in Middle Eastern politics — later seen by their invasion of Kuwait in 1990 — and this led the US to look for support from Iran and Syria, especially in any peace negotiations with Israel.

Revelations have fuelled this theory that in 1989 Margaret Thatcher, then British prime minister, and George Bush agreed on the telephone to a 'low-key' approach to the emerging picture of Iranian and Syrian complicity.

Tam Dalyall, a British Labour member of Parliament who has taken an interest in the Lockerbie tragedy, said: 'They (the Syrians and Iranians) were our allies in the Gulf War. It was inconvenient to put the blame on them.'

'The two in Libya may well have been hit men. But I am pretty sure they were involved with other countries, probably including Syria and Iran.'

American and British demands for the extradition of the two Libyans to face trial in the west have met with the response that they could expect little 'justice,' since the issue has been pre-judged. The British justice system is currently under sustained attack following several highly publicised miscarriages of justice, including the false imprisonment of six men for the IRA bombing of a pub in Birmingham in 1974.

In America, the two Libyans have been found guilty in the mainstream media, although little substantiating evidence has been made available.

The extradition moves are looked on as being against international law, which does not require states to hand over their own nationals for investigation or trial by another country.

The 1971 Montreal Convention, which the Libyans have evoked, puts the responsibility onto the country from which the alleged offenders originate for taking them into custody. It also says that other states should afford 'one another the greatest possible assistance in connection with the criminal proceedings brought in respect of the offence'.

The Libyans, who instigated their own judicial inquiry, say they did not receive the co-operation afforded under the convention.

Stephen Mitchell, a British lawyer retained by the Libyans, said: 'I am not sure what the British position is, but if it is that 'these people are guilty,

you must hand them over and we won't give you any evidence in support of the charges against them,' then I can understand the Libyans' reluctance to hand them over, as well as their inability to try them for lack of evidence.'

Critics view the zest with which the Americans are attempting to extradite the two men as having implications for the whole developing world. They point to the UN resolution just imposed, which says the Libyans must 'distance themselves' from terrorism. Many believe, since the resolution is too open-ended to interpret, it is a means to dictate American demands.

Mohammed Arif, of the British Afro-Asian Solidarity Organisation, said: 'What is happening to Libya reflects what will happen to those countries which do not fit into the 'New World Order'. They will be put under pressure because they are not willing to accept the dictates of the USA.'

This could lay the seeds for the next episode of the Lockerbie tragedy. The Arab world is being so pushed into a corner that it has to react. And the first target will undoubtedly be any peace initiative with America's most powerful Middle East ally, Israel.

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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.

### Alleviating poverty

Sir, May I refer to the illuminating article of Prof Rehman Sobhan on the above subject published in The Daily Star from 16-18 April '92. The article is scholarly indeed.

I, however, feel that the complex model he has developed for poverty alleviation is less likely to be implementable in an underdeveloped situation as obtaining in Bangladesh. Such model perhaps needs a developed situation for implementation. Besides, the model advocated for more governance whereas many think that the best government is which administers the least. Truly, for success of anything in Bangladesh less governance is a must. For poverty alleviation, therefore, development of a simple model is the crying need of the hour.

Prof Sobhan has aptly touched on the strengthening of the institutions of local self-government in which the poor will have the dominant role for design and management of poverty alleviation programme. Perhaps the greatest beauty of his article lies here.

In fact, the poor should be given the charge for poverty alleviation by themselves through the mechanism of suitable institution. Such institution may be establishment of literacy, education, training and co-operative centres in each locality of a village all over the country under the aegis of Gram Parishad/Sarkar. Such centres, through the patronage of Local Govts and also Central Govt, will not only organise productive programmes in all sectors and sub-sectors of the rural economy side by side with literacy, education and training programmes, but will also organise capital formation for further investment and production needs. Such centres will also provide the gate-

way to the government for undertaking all kinds of rural activities, on their part.

In sum, poverty alleviation programme is nothing but productive programme. Without literacy, education, training and co-operative and individual ventures through such centres as proposed, realisation of poverty alleviation may remain a far cry.

Abul Quasem, Bally Road, Dhaka.

### The brave Afghans

Sir, 'Kabul fatha shud' — Kabul has been conquered. Heartiest congratulations to the Afghan Mujahideens on their victory.

Once the Afghans ruled from Ghazni to Sonargaon, Babur the Moghul took over

the reign of New Delhi from Ibrahim Lodhi after the battle of Panipath in the year 1524. But Sher Shah from Bengal avenged the defeat by ousting Babur's son Humayun in the year 1540.

The Afghans fought against the British in 1842 and killed all the 15,000 British soldiers except leaving only one survivor to narrate the story.

From 1978 to 1990 the Afghans fought a sanguinary war against one million Soviet forces and succeeded in forcing them all out from their country. Finally the Afghan Mujahideens have eliminated the last vestiges of the communist forces on April 25.

Today there is jubilation and celebrations all over Afghanistan. We enjoy the Afghans at this hour of their rejoicing.

The peoples of Bangladesh and Afghanistan have always maintained a close, friendly, cordial, cultural and trade relations with each other. The brave Afghans have helped the Bangladeshis especially those living in the then West Pakistan during our war of independence in 1971.

Afghanistan needs to be rebuilt from scratch like Bangladesh. The great Mujahideen leader Prof Sibgatullah Mujaddedi after taking over the responsibility of new Afghanistan has rightly declared a general amnesty in the country. We wish peace, prosperity, happiness, economic emancipation for the Afghans who have suffered tremendously during the last 14 years.

O H Kabir, Dhaka