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## Setbacks in Rio

While few people expected the Earth Summit to produce a miracle in the form of a package of instant solutions to the world's environmental problems, no one was prepared to see the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) face severe setbacks and move towards an uncertain end. True, a number of environment-related treaties have been signed and more may be approved before the meeting closes on June 14. However, experts have already started speculating on the size of the failure rather than on the extent of success. In fact, the mood in Rio has become a bitter one, marked by anger and disappointment among the developing countries as well as among many UN experts, and obstinacy and a kind of defensive insularism among some, but not all, industrialised nations.

There is really nothing new about the contentious and divisive issues which have come into the limelight in Rio. They had surfaced and become major issues at earlier preparatory conferences, including at the one in Kuala Lumpur. At the Malaysian capital, delegates from the developing South, especially the country's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad, had rightly argued that the Third World was unable to put major constraints on its development process, for the sake of environmental protection, unless the North accepted its major responsibility in safeguarding the global ecology through a mechanism that is agreed on in Rio.

In this respect, the position of the North or, rather, of the damage caused to human lives, plants and even forests on a global scale by the industrialised nations, mainly through their reckless use of the world's energy and emission of carbon dioxide, is well-covered in documents produced by the United Nations, rather than by experts in Third World. These documents make the United States appear as the worst offender.

This is where the Rio Summit faces its most severe setback in the form of the refusal of Washington to go along with the consensus on the whole set of proposals, turning its back on a number of treaties especially on protection of forests which even other industrialised nations are ready to sign, on the ground that its acceptance of these agreements would hurt the US economy. Here, the position taken by the Bush Administration is so utterly insular — indeed, even selfish — that the US negotiator at the Summit, William K Reilly was obliged to write a confidential memo to the White House, leaked to the press, requesting for a change in the US position.

What happens next or before the end of the Summit remains anybody's guess. The United States becomes the 'odd man out', as it was at the UN Law of the Sea Conference in the seventies. However, putting Washington in isolation does not solve the world's problems, whether they relate to development or environment, if not both. However, what is most disturbing is that the Earth Summit will produce a new type of confrontation, between the North and the South, replacing the old East-West rivalry. In this confrontation, the position taken by several Asian leaders, especially Dr Mahathir Mohammad, will be that we can no longer take up environment in isolation. Instead, we must face up to the whole range of issues, especially free trade, flow of investment and technology from the North to the South, and questions of aid and debt, and try to get a fair deal for all. The Earth Summit may well prove once again that there are no short cuts to salvation of the mankind.

## Cruelty to Domestic Servants Must Stop

Cruelties at their egregious mercilessness to maid-servants or boy-servants — as reported in the press — are indeed nauseating. One common mode of torture is beating the victim black and blue but in some cases, various parts of the victim's body are burnt with hot iron or other substances. A nine-year-old girl named Nargis fell victim to the wrath of her employer, a housewife, last Sunday at a residence at Maghbar. Several parts of her body have been severely burnt by the irate mistress of the house for the failure to carry out an order.

Torture for Nargis like many of her kind was, according to her, a routine affair. Last Sunday only brought her the worst to face. The sad part of such bizarre incidents is that many of them simply go unreported. Nargis's case could very well meet the same fate had she not dared come out of the house in the early next morning. She is now, luckily enough, undergoing treatment at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. But many of them are left to nurse their wounds all by themselves.

Considering all this, the question that ought to be resolved first of all is: if such things should ever happen in a society. It is not that society can dispense with such helping hands. It is a clear case of child labour the society is allowing in violation of its own set rules. But that is tolerable as long as the practice acts as a positive deterrent to a more miserable and painful living. The fact that child labour is illegal is itself a double standard doing perhaps more harm than good to the interests of those selling their labour at a very tender age. As things stand now, their labour goes unrecognised and unpaid. If we cannot do away with child labour, we should better make provision for them to get as much reward as they deserve for their services to society. They have, moreover, no service rules or fixed duty hours to protect their interests. Society cannot go on deceiving itself permanently.

If employer-employee relations worked, at least the Nargises could avoid such wretched fate. If we cannot give them a better deal for their day-long toil, we can at least provide them with a legal cover for what they render for society. Until that happens, such barbaric incidents should be dealt with as ruthlessly as possible. Laws of the land should be strictly enforced to punish perpetrators of such cruel acts. Offending persons can also be boycotted socially with the most desired effect. The woman who has meted out such inhuman torture to Nargis should not be given any reprieve. Let it be an eye-opener for the intending offenders.

# Indians are Unhappy : Need for Principled Politics

WE Indians are unhappy. We find the government inadequate, the leadership inept. We feel helpless. As we look towards the future, we are filled with doubts. We fear more troubles.

Yet not long ago, we were an optimistic lot. We took the worst of happenings in our stride. We were not daunted. We never allowed the gloom to overcome us. We were confident we would be over the hump soon. And now everything seems so distant and so dismal.

The mood of despair has gripped us because we have failed to solve our problems — economic, political or social. They were initially small and manageable. But we allowed them to pile up. It was believed that with the passage of time they would disappear. Some rulers even tinkered with them. But none had patience or insight to deal with them. Now they look forbidding.

The worst part is the violence they have set into motion. Violence has become the arbiter. It has permeated the society and has taken the shape of even barbarism as is seen in Punjab. Can democracy be preserved in this atmosphere? And even if it is preserved, does it add up to anything meaningful? This is what politicians, academicians, lawyers, doctors, technicians, journalists and others have to ponder over.

The governments at the

centre and in the states have tried to contain violence by brutal policing. For them, all demands and aspirations are a law and order problem. More stringent measures and harsher laws are supposed to tackle the unrest. But the situation has worsened. The people's faith in the very parliamentary system is waning. They are coming to believe that there is no orderly way to overcome their difficulties.

Therefore, there is less respect for the law, which in any case has lost sanctity because of overvalued justice. High-handed and arbitrary actions are carried out with impunity. The ethical considerations in society have become generally dim. Tyrants have sprouted at all levels — tyrants whose claim to authority is based on their capability to terrorise the people.

It is no use picking on one political party, although the ruling Congress(I) must share the maximum blame. All leaders have contributed to the mess we are in today. The result is not only lack of faith in them but insensitivity and a paralysis of the will to do the right and proper things. The style of nihilistic violence is being passed on to the next generation. It is survival of the fittest; methods have ceased to matter.

And whatever their public face, political parties continue to indulge in the same old game of gaining ascendancy through manipulation. They have double standards. They

swear by the ballot box but employ such methods as foster undemocratic behaviour. For their pretty ends, they have brutalised the society.

How do we turn the tide? If we do not do so, we will founder for the next 20-30 years in a chaotic, meaningless series of disasters and inhuman acts.

Terrorism has to be met by the people, not the government alone. A determined nation can face it. The response should be that of defiance and

had not encouraged defections in the Jammu and Kashmir legislature in 1984 to dismiss Farooq Abdullah, the state chief minister at that time, the insurgency would not have taken roots.

The Assam problem has arisen because of New Delhi's neglect. If the agreement between the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and Rajiv Gandhi had been signed, the militant ULF would not have gained ground. Similarly, the

have to give up outbidding each other in making promises when doing so distorts the political process. We have to work jointly towards a conciliation in the country. Mere lip-service faith in the consensus, now seen in the country, may not do.

The National Integration Council has been a farce. It is being used to confuse the people. It has not initiated even an honest debate on key issues, much less provide a forum for discussion of their solution. A people's movement needs to be built to reignite confidence in the democratic system. There has to be an atmosphere where violence is abhorred and where those at the helm of affairs realise that the critics have some share of the truth.

The greatest need of the moment is to restructure our institutions — economic, political and social — and give a new purpose to politics in the country. There are no instant solutions to problems arising out of basic social change; there are no effective ways of resolving them satisfactorily except through an open but the value-based competitive political process. Failure to recognise this will be grave folly. For, in a society experiencing change, regimes tend to freeze the situation rather than transform it for the better.

The task, therefore, is the task of bridging the gap between the centres of decision-making and the people. Parliament and legislatures on the one hand, and the Central

Government and the states' administrative structures on the other, are too distant from the public. The system does not deliver the goods any more. It has become too centralised, too bureaucratic and too authoritarian.

Probably there is no other way except to decentralise power in such a way that the people remain sovereign. All rulers tend to misuse authority. There is a case for reviving the proposal by Jaya Prakash Narayan, India's Gandhian leader, of recalling elected representatives from parliament and assemblies if one-third of the electorate so decides. The Scandinavian countries follow this practice.

Once the elected representatives know that they are not for the full five-year-term and that their exasperated voters may call them back, there is a reasonable chance of power residing in those who are at the grassroots and who, at present, are neglected. Then the manner political parties admit undesirable elements into their ranks will not do much harm because the people will be able to assert themselves whenever they find things going awry.

There is still a chance to save the nation from the pool of blood which it otherwise may have to wade through. This cannot be avoided if political parties throw values to the wind, make compromise on the fundamentals and damage the very moral ethos which one thought would be safer as the days went by.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

not mere individual security. It is going to be a long, relentless battle but the country can win if it acts unitedly. Our problem is that we have no clear cut policy either on Punjab, Kashmir, or for that matter, on any issue which torments the nation.

The trouble is not with the facts. The trouble is that clear and honest inferences have not been drawn from the facts. Punjab is a Sikh problem and should be tackled as such. If the 1984 accord between the late prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and the late Sikh leader Harcharan Singh Longwal had been implemented, the story of Punjab would have been different. Kashmir is a problem of the valley's alienation and any solution has to be such as retrieves the people. If the then Governor Jagmohan

problem of poverty in the country is because of overpopulation and faulty economic policies. If there had not been bureaucrats' bungling and the politicians' dishonesty, India would not have become a supplicant nation.

But the ifs of history are at best hypothetical and at worst subjective. We have to live with the blunders of yesterday. True, there must be accountability. But by merely apportioning blame or by procrastinating, we will not solve the problems. Time has come, to quote John Kennedy, for the people to feel what they can do for the country, not what the country can do for them.

The nation needs a period of purposive and principled politics, against self-aggrandisement. It may be asking for the moon, but political parties will

# City College Should be Spared of Musclemanny

by Nilratan Halder

OF late Dhaka City College is having its share of trouble from terrorism that has been sweeping the country's educational institutions for quite a long time now. For the college that has managed so ably until recently to thwart the terrorism's infiltration, the attack on teachers by a handful of irregular students reinforced by terrorists from outside has come as a double shock. First, the college's enviable record has been shattered by this single incident and second, the problem is somewhat different in that the terrorists consider none other than the teachers as their opponents and have made them the target of their attack. The general students who have been forced to suffer in the process are no party to the feud.

As the closure of the college continues since April 27, the day the attackers unleashed a reign of terror on the college campus, there are conflicting reports on the developments that are taking place at almost regular intervals. The incidents, sadly enough, are now spilling over to the streets and areas around, rather than being just confined to the college premises, causing untold suffering to the public. The other day, students, about a hundred according to reports published, put up a road blockade on Mirpur Road near the

Science Laboratory demanding immediate opening of the college.

The crux of the problem is that one never knows if the concern shown for opening the college is anything but restoration of peaceful academic atmosphere. When the students — a section of them to be more precise — find a dialogue between them and their teachers is impossible, credit goes neither to any of the parties involved, nor to the education system of the country. Students have known not only to wield firearms but also to trade in politics which is muddier than ever before.

Is not it absurd that students are keen on keeping the college open and teachers, all of them, are dead against it? Something somewhere has gone seriously wrong. And the wrong finds its origin in one single incident involving the second-time admission (not to confuse with readmission) of a student who incidentally happens to be the vice-president of the college students' union. The incident in detail is that the VP dropped himself out when he was a B Com (pass) examinee. He then wanted to get himself admitted to first year BA (pass) class. The college authority, finding it contrary to the rules of the college, refused to take him in. The authority was however

most willing to allow him to sit for the next B Com examination.

The different stands both the VP, who naturally has a following among the students, and the teachers jointly took on the issue are evidently irreconcilable and hence confrontation was the only recourse to which the student leader indulged himself. What is now happening since is a show of force aimed to intimidate the teachers, the principal in particular, for their submission to the untenable demand. It is a clear case of an attempt to give an individual grievance — no matter how logical or illogical — the look of a collective character and thus undermine the institutional sanctity.

When dead set, political leaders or for that matter student leaders, can play either very nasty and wreak havoc with the order and discipline or immaculately fair to give truth a chance even at the cost of their own lives. In today's politics of convenience, sacrifice is an alien word to most leaders. In all cases, save a few, political leaders make most of the messy situation and student leaders, until recently invulnerable, have been following in their seniors' footsteps.

The strategy is the same and all possible avenues are

most dedicatedly explored to score points — no matter if the stand taken is justified or not. Giving any problem a colour of common concern, these days, is not very difficult. As has happened in this case, a few things with at least the appearance of them relating a large number of people's lives have quite cleverly been interwoven in the personal issue so that it looks convincing enough to the public. For example, one complaint is that the college authority has reduced the number of seats for students in different classes and is going to raise the tuition fees.

Well, the claim is not at all disputed. But the teachers also have a point which is that the reduction is insignificant and the move has been forced on them by circumstances. With the introduction of B Sc classes and increased facilities for practical classes, a few rooms earlier used as class rooms had to be reserved for the purpose. More, a few rooms also had to be allocated for use as offices of the students' union. So quite a number of class rooms are now unavailable. On the other hand, resources for increasing the class room facilities are very limited; so is the case with space.

As for the raising of tuition fees, the college authority argues, it knows no other way than opting for the move. The college earns about Tk 500,000 from tuition fees but has to spend about Tk 600,000 every month. This means that the college is currently incurring a monthly loss of about Tk 100,000. This loss is being met from the college fund which will soon become dry if this continues. The other argument in favour of the authority is that the tuition fees for different classes of this college are still lower than those of comparable colleges, say Ideal College, Vicarunessa Noon School and College etc.

When the college authority has to abide by the government directive of keeping the number of students to a certain limit also, the college has hardly any other option, specially in the event of an increase in salary for the teachers and employees. The college moreover, is a superb example of a success story made possible through private initiative. Its result is an envy of many a college now. Therefore, it surely qualifies itself to take up the somewhat painful measure.

One of the demands then concerns the creation of residential facilities for the students. The teachers would only

love it. But the problem is the space once again. Situated on one-high land with two buildings — one five-storey and the other six-storey — the college had a very humble beginning. Today, however, it has unfolded itself as a leading college of the country. A proposal for introducing honours classes was once extended to the college authority. Even another proposal was for shifting the location from its present congested area. Maybe, all such proposals have their merits. But all those can be implemented if the government comes with generous aid and assistance. And the support should come not only in the form of money and other materials but also to reinforce the college authority's principled stand of not mixing personal or group interests of dubious sort with the interest of the institution. A concerted campaign against the principal of the college orchestrated by the interested group has happily got dampened, because the allegations were unfounded.

There is a need for restoring peace on the college campus and those responsible for vitiating the atmosphere should be taken care of. Only then can the college retain its high standard and set its aim still higher.

The writer is an Assistant Editor of the Daily Star.

# Mexico : A Spill-Over of Hatred

Latin Americans living in US border towns are getting the brunt of US police backlash from the recent Los Angeles race riots. Eduardo Molina of IPS reports from Mexico City.

search of employment.

The Mexican Foreign Ministry has presented a formal protest to stop the human rights violations against the workers through its consul in Los Angeles, Jose Angel Pescador.

Latinos in the United States number some 24 million and comprise about nine percent of the total US population, a report from the US Justice Department said. In cities like Los Angeles, people of Latin American origin are almost as many as those of Anglo-Saxon origin.

Each year some 800,000 Latinos are violently robbed

whole another 2.2 million are victims of assault and house burglary.

In southern United States, there are about three million Latin Americans without legal work permits. Most of them are Mexicans, who take on jobs in farms as fruit or vegetable pickers and in the service sector as cleaning personnel.

The African-Americans, who number about 30 million, comprise over 12 percent of the total US population. Official records show less blacks are crime victims than Latin Americans in the United States.

Analysts say racial clashes in the United States are not limited to hostile confrontations between blacks and whites.

"There is also conflict between the different minority groups," said Mexican researcher Dava Gutierrez. "Many blacks living in the poor areas are the Mexicans as competitors."

The recent events have highlighted friction among minority groups, which now include a growing number of Asians. In the Los Angeles area, Korean-Americans have been one of the more specific targets of black ire for years.

Some African-Americans contend the Asian newcomers who usually establish mom-and-pop type of stores in predominantly black neighborhoods take advantage of them.

"In the capitalist jungle, the law of survival in the case of inter-racial clashes in the United States as well as in

Europe," commented Gutierrez.

Other analysts confirmed the recent racial violence was "an explosion of reality" that revealed the hidden wounds left by neoliberal policies implemented by the US government since former US President Ronald Reagan assumed power in January 1982.

N. Piptone, a researcher from the Colegio de Mexico, said incidents like the LA riots come about when a government becomes indifferent to the realities of the people.

Added Piptone: "This is a big step backward in the lives of millions of people who, since they cannot flow along with the rest of society toward modernity, are simply left in institutional oblivion."

He said the racial turmoil in Los Angeles, which has spread to other US cities and Latin American countries, represents the sudden and violent awakening of a marginalised people who, until the Rodney King verdict, had opted to remain silent.

## To the Editor...

"Without assigning any reason"

Sir, Clause 9 (2) of 'Bangladesh Public Servants Retirement Act, 1974' mentions the government may, at any time, retire from service a public servant who has completed twenty-five years of service 'without assigning any reason'.

I consider the inclusion of the last four words in the clause is a gross violation of basic human rights and, therefore, legally untenable. No action of any individual, society, group, class or government which affects the life, peace and happiness of other individual or group can be taken 'without assigning any reason'.

A government servant enters into a contract while

joining service. Can there be any contract where any party can take any action 'without assigning any reason'?

I like to draw the attention of our legal thinkers as well as preachers of human rights to this clause, which, I am sure, is a legacy of the rules and regulations framed during Pakistan days. This must have been adopted in Bangladesh without anyone going into the implications of the words. I would also like to get a clarification from the Establishment Division of the government and would like to know if the service rules of any other country other than those of Pakistan and Bangladesh contain such a clause. The words 'without assigning any reason', in my opinion, cuts across the very concept of human rationality. No rational being can do anything affecting

another rational being 'without assigning any reason'.

It may be argued that there are reasons which are known to government but are not being 'assigned' or 'put forward'. I consider that also against natural justice. Justice, as the saying goes, should not only be done, it should also be shown as done. Transparency in all actions is what makes democracy worthwhile. It is only an autocrat who does things against others 'without assigning any reason'.

Recently a good number of government servants of various departments have been ordered to go on retirement under the said Act of 1974. An official who has been given such order has the right to know the reason why he has been singled out while thousands of others who have

also completed 25 years of service are retained in service. If no reason is assigned then the affected official can believe that he is being victimised for 'personal grudge' or on 'hearsay' or any other fictitious ground which would not stand to logical and rational scrutiny.

When we are fighting against all black laws would not it be worthwhile to look into such illogical clauses affecting government servants, who after serving the government for 25 years, deserve rational treatment from the employer?

M A Ali

Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka.

## Killing of Dr Milon

Sir, The killing of Dr Milon is still shrouded in mystery. The spot where Dr Milon was

killed was crowded with anti-Ershad activists at the time of his killing. In the adjoining areas, the armed cadres of All Party Students Unity (APSU) were fighting with the pro-Ershad armed group. A rigorous, rational analysis could hardly justify the killing of Dr Milon by the bullets coming from the opposite side of the Suhrawardy Udyan where the pro-Ershad armed cadres took position. The other day, all but one accused of Dr Milon murder case have been acquitted reversing the hitherto-known belief that Dr Milon was killed by the bullets of the pro-Ershad armed activists.

History always does not record the truth. Very often history is beset with even downright falsehoods. The killing of Dr Milon has been a

glaring example substantiating the above statements. The recent developments centring Dr Milon murder case force us to believe that nobody was killed named Dr Milon at the height of anti-Ershad movement on the road beside the Teachers-Students Centre (TSC) road-island. But we saw with our own eyes the dead body of a young man who was identified as Dr Milon. Against this backdrop, the questions arise who were the real killers of Dr Milon? Should they not be brought to book? Should the people not know what truth had been hidden in the folds of 1990 anti-Ershad movement?

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