

Dhaka, Sunday, June 21, 1992

Deadlock in Cambodia

The deadlock facing the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in persuading the Khmer Rouge faction to place its guerrillas under the peacekeepers' supervision in readiness for disarmament is neither the first nor the last hurdle encountered by the world body in completing its mission in the strife-torn country. Maybe the situation is not entirely hopeless since the other three factions have agreed to regroup their forces in specially designated areas on schedule. Again, in Sydney, the Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, often described as the architect of the peace plan, regards the reluctance of the Khmer Rouge to follow the agreed schedule as a kind of brinkmanship, aimed at maximising its position before the peace process actually gets off the ground.

Coming weeks will show whether one should share the cautious optimism of Evans or the growing concern expressed by UNTAC's chief, Yasushi Akashi who has hinted that the UN forces could resort to armed attack if they are attacked or obstructed by the Khmer Rouge in carrying out their duties. However, he hastened to point out that an armed response by the UN could be the "last resort", while the military commander of the operation, General John Sanderson stressed that the UN peacekeepers lacked the necessary mandate to enforce the plan.

The Cambodian mission which had always been a delicate one is also turning dangerous. A Bangladeshi soldier, one of 850 members of the country's contingent serving with the UN peace-keeping force, has just suffered serious injuries in his eyes in a mine blast. It is the first accident of its kind. Let us hope that it will be the last.

How the UNTAC continues to tackle the problems in carrying out its assignment, on the basis of the peace plan, remains to be seen. But a number of questions can no longer be avoided.

One question relates to the need for taking the matter back to the Security Council for a new mandate that strengthens the authority of UNTAC in dealing with the Khmer Rouge. However, Akashi may like to give the dissident faction a bit more time to change its mind — and strategy.

Meanwhile, the UN Secretary General, Dr Boutros Ghali has emphasised the need for strengthening the powers of the Security Council and even hinted at the possibility of the world body setting up a standing UN peace-keeping army that, on a short notice, can deal with an emergency situation. The proposal relating to the powers of the Security Council, together with the idea of enlarging its composition, is part of an on-going discussion. The talk of the UN setting up a permanent army of its own has been heard before, but never seriously pursued.

The deadlock in Cambodia raises new questions of the UN effectiveness, under its existing rules. Situations which are more difficult than one in Cambodia exist in the Balkan region, especially in the former Yugoslavia, as well as between Armenia and Azerbaijan in what was once Soviet Union. At this moment, the United Nations cannot enter into these areas to prevent further chaos and bloodshed, unless the world body is given more powers, if not a standing peace-keeping force of its own. Herein lies some logic behind the proposals of Dr Ghali.

Studies on Sea

Some people view, perhaps not without reason, that man's future rests to a great extent on the judicious exploitation of sea resources. Oceanography, relatively a less known subject, is responsible for taking up the hazardous job of maritime study, planning and collection of marine resources. Highly costly as such studies are, the problems faced by the National Oceanographic and Maritime Institute (NOAMI) in conducting research are numerous and often insurmountable. But the country, due to its deltaic swathe, needs more sea research than many other country would ever do. Such research assumes even further importance in the context of the rise of the sea level due to global warming.

The fact that the 12th annual general meeting of the NOAMI has arrived at a decision to gear up its research activities on the eve of a workshop on "rise of sea level due to increase in temperature and its effects" is a reaffirmation, within limit, of the institute's commitment to the task. To be held in Dhaka in November under the joint auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Inter-governmental Ocean Commission (IOC) and NOAMI, the proposed workshop will offer a unique opportunity to place before it some of the special problems facing Bangladesh.

Admittedly, it is impossible for a country like Bangladesh alone to take up studies to determine the impacts of sea rise, more so to adopt any remedial measure. It can, however, observe some of the routine changes in the climate to help arrive at a conclusion in the overall analysis of the changing pattern of the environment in the region. The local phenomena may contribute quite substantially to the global system and even go at a great length in understanding the nature of disaster to strike this particular low-lying area. The UNEP and other concerned UN agencies have a great responsibility in coordinating efforts in this regard and also mobilising resources from all possible sources. But this can be expedited further if the groundwork is done by us — the nation in need of urgent help.

On this count, the NOAMI's responsibility stretches beyond what it has been used to do. Not only should it concentrate on presenting a sketch of the possible areas to be covered but also the resources the country has been exploiting and those yet to be done in future. A rough plan or strategy will also be worked out so that the international experts get something with substance to discuss about. The determination expressed by the institute should, however, be matched by adequate funding to prepare the primary report. We hope, the internal resource will be enough to justify our seriousness in pursuing the subject and the actual implementation part of the job.

I am often asked to compare the economic performance of the different countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Our own performance has been so poor that such an effort is not a very pleasant exercise. A long list of failures characterize our performance. What are the factors responsible for such a dismal record? Obviously, a lot of things went wrong. Absence of political stability is often mentioned as an important reason for our lacklustre performance. While political stability is certainly very important, in my view, it is equally important to have stable economic policies. Uncertainty about economic policies paralyzes the entrepreneurs. Long and medium term decisions and even short term decisions for investment is not possible if the investors are not confident about the rules of the game. What assurance is there that these will not be changed in the middle of the game? There are, of course, other key factors such as resource endowment, physical infrastructure, banking and financial system, availability of managerial and technical manpower etc. Needless to say, a national consensus about the direction of economic development is a pre-requisite for growth. Indeed the stability of economic policies that I was referring to is not possible in the absence of a consensus in the society.

I have had the privilege to observe at close range the phenomenal progress achieved by the East and South Asian countries. Their economic performance in the last 20 years has been so rapid that it has aroused not only the interest but also the envy of countries in other parts of the world. During the last forty

Literacy Has a Clear Effect on Skill and Productivity Level

In what way are we different from the East and South East Asian countries? I believe our farmers and labourers work hard and long hours. But there is a big difference. Most of our people working in the fields and factories are illiterate, their productivity is much lower not only by international standard but also by the standard of the East and South East Asian countries.

years the NIEs of East Asia achieved an average growth of 6 per cent while the South East Asian countries registered an average growth rate of 3 per cent. Against this, the South Asian countries had an average growth rate of only 1.5 per cent. Unfortunately Bangladesh had an even lower growth rate — only 0.3 per cent. These differing rates of progress have meant, for example, that at the end of the 1980s, per capita income in the Republic of Korea was seven times higher as compared with those prevailing in 1950s. It must be a matter of profound disappointment for us that during these long four decades Bangladesh gained in per capita income only by 60 per cent!

I have tried to analyze the reasons for our poor performance. In what way are we different from the East and South East Asian countries? Are we not hard working enough? I believe our farmers and labourers work hard and long hours. Of course there is a big difference. Most of our people working in the fields and factories are illiterate whereas the farmers and workers in these other countries are literate. The productivity of our work force is much lower not only by international standard

but also by the standard of the East and South East Asian countries. As a result the hard work put in by our workers yields poor result. Naturally their income is low.

Let us look at the literacy situation in Bangladesh today. Literacy has clearly an effect on the level of skill and productivity. I am here referring essentially to primary educa-

tion but a higher percentage of boys and girls with high school education should also be taken into account. A sub-regional comparison of literacy figures reveals a grim picture. Since 1960 the Asian NIEs and ASEAN four countries reduced their average adult illiteracy rates from a range of 37 to 40 per cent to 9 per cent for the NIEs and 14 per cent for the ASEAN four countries. The literacy performance of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan over the last 30-year period stands in stark contrast. Their illiteracy rates averaged 75 per cent in 1960, and remain at an average of 55 per cent. The

precise projections from UNESCO for 1990 were: India 47 per cent, Bangladesh 59 per cent and Pakistan 60 per cent. In other words, in spite of an early start in modern education, on average, over half the adult populations of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan are still unable to read or write more than 40 years after independence from colonial rule. It

as high as 77 per cent. By contrast, female illiteracy rates have been reduced to the range of 12 to 15 per cent in the Republic of Korea, Thailand and the Philippines and to about 34 per cent in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Development economists today accept the basic premise that education is the most important element of the social infrastructure. Many studies have shown the very high returns of public investment in primary education. Except for Sri Lanka, public spending in education in South Asia has generally lagged behind. Even the inadequate expenditure is distorted. Higher education, largely for the children of the elite, claims the lion's share. The NIEs have steadily increased their outlay on human resources development including R and D activities. In Korea, for example, investment in education between 1966 and 1975 averaged 9 per cent of GNP or a third of the investment in physical capital. The significance of the above analysis should not be difficult to grasp. There seems to be a striking connection between education and growth. Illiteracy and economic stagnation are almost inseparable. A large pool of educated, skilled and

trained labour force makes all the difference in productivity. One often hears talk about work ethics but one can easily see that it is not ethics but education and training which makes all the difference. Relatively low wages and high productivity are the twin foundations on which Japan and East Asia and now South East Asia have made their dramatic progress.

Illiteracy, specially female illiteracy, also adversely affects other programmes including the family planning programmes. The success achieved by the East and South East Asian countries in reducing their population growth rates can be attributed to the high literacy rates — specially among women — in those countries. We should look around and try to take lessons from others and determine afresh our priorities. Our land is one of the best in the world and yet per acre productivity is low. Industrial wages are low and yet cost of production is high because of low labour productivity. We have one of the oldest and largest family planning programmes but our success is far too modest to take any satisfaction. I am convinced that we must address the problem of our backwardness and economic stagnation at the root. The quality of human resources must be upgraded, as quickly as possible, in order to escape the vicious circle of poverty, low productivity, high population growth rate and consequent economic stagnation.

The author, a former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh who until recently served as the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, will be now writing a regular weekly column for this paper as a guest columnist.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

tion but a higher percentage of boys and girls with high school education should also be taken into account. A sub-regional comparison of literacy figures reveals a grim picture. Since 1960 the Asian NIEs and ASEAN four countries reduced their average adult illiteracy rates from a range of 37 to 40 per cent to 9 per cent for the NIEs and 14 per cent for the ASEAN four countries. The literacy performance of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan over the last 30-year period stands in stark contrast. Their illiteracy rates averaged 75 per cent in 1960, and remain at an average of 55 per cent. The

is a matter not only of regret but shame that in the Asia-Pacific region it is only in South Asia where the absolute number of adult illiterates increased over the past three decades. China brought down its illiteracy rate from 70 to 26 per cent during the 30 years, with 75 million reduction in absolute numbers. Indonesia also managed a decrease of 5 million during its 30 per cent drop, down to 20 per cent illiteracy by 1990. The figures on female adult illiteracy in Bangladesh as well as India and Pakistan are no less distressing. In these three countries, female illiteracy still averages

Indian Laws Promote Police Brutality, Says AI

Prakash Chandra writes from New Delhi

Indian laws have been interpreted by security forces as a licence to torture and kill with impunity. The police apparently believe they have the immunity from prosecution.

THE scene seemed to be straight out of Hollywood — American policemen beating up an ordinary citizen.

Almost 60 people have died, scores have been injured and millions of dollars worth of property were destroyed following the acquittal of the policemen involved in the incident. The American presidential campaign has taken on a new complexion and racism debates have heated up anew.

And yet that single incident of alleged police brutality pales in comparison to reports of alleged police excesses in India, recently documented by Amnesty International (AI).

In incident after incident, the Indian police have been reported to violate human rights calling to mind the days of the British Raj when excesses by law enforcers seemed equally commonplace.

But even people who remember those days are quick to point out that there was then no "reign on terror". Men, women and even children were arrested, beaten up and tortured to make them confess to crimes they did not commit but it was not a routine practice. Only "politically" active people were picked up for questioning and subjected to torture.

There was another major difference between then and now — the perpetrators of atrocities during the days of the British Raj were servants of a foreign government. The current excesses are being committed by agents of a freely elected government, in the world's largest democracy.

Human rights activists claim that the scale of police oppression has increased tremendously.

"India has certainly one of the best-run democratic governments in the world but that cannot justify police atrocities on common people," says one foreign observer. "In no civilised country, at least in the West, are people afraid to

go to the police. Here a policeman's knock on the door will send a chill down your spine. Before you know it, you can be locked up on some trumped up charge."

The recent report of Amnesty International (AI) indicted India for failure to defend human rights and for allowing them to be trampled down by a ruthless police force.

Excerpts from the report, published recently by major Indian newspapers, claimed that, "In India, there is a substantive body of evidence that government and official agencies have made special efforts to cover up human rights violations and prevent the police and security forces from being punished."

"Amnesty International knows of only three out of 415 cases of custodial deaths which occurred since 1985 in which police officers accused of torturing people to death have been convicted by the courts. The only states in which this is known to have happened are Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Orissa."

Although in judgment after judgment courts have sharply criticised police conduct in extracting confessions from alleged criminals (one court decision even described the police as a bunch of thugs) police officers tried by courts are often acquitted and even promoted.

AI has noted that in several states, such as Manipur, Rajasthan and Jammu and Kashmir, no police officer has been prosecuted or convicted. It is alleged that often, direct or indirect pressure from the executive arm of the government prevents the prosecution of erring law enforcers.

Thus, in Uttar Pradesh, AI reported that immunity was

effectively granted to members of the provincial armed constabulary and prison officials who allegedly tortured and killed Muslims in their custody during communal rioting in Meerut in 1987.

According to AI, there is "compelling evidence" that police and other security forces feel free to act with impunity in violating the rights of those in their custody. Special laws in force in states where there is armed insurgency explicitly grant immunity from prosecution to the police and other security forces.

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, currently in force in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam and other north-east states, gives the security forces wide powers to make arrests, conduct searches without warrant and to kill, AI said.

AI believes provisions such as this have been interpreted by the security forces as a licence to torture and kill with impunity. The police apparently believe the provisions have given them immunity from prosecutions and other civil processes.

Thus, police excesses have been reported rampant in the insurgency-troubled states of Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Assam and allegedly have also spread to areas without any insurgency problems. Experienced police officers say excesses are the accepted practice, not the exception.

The numerous reports of police atrocities have even the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Commission looking into Indian laws alleged to be facilitating human rights violations.

The Indian government has, of course, vehemently denied AI's charges.

An Indian delegate told the UN Sub-commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities that AI has given no details to substantiate its allegation.

"The law in India forbids a police officer to use more than the minimum force required to deal with a particular situation," he said. "The government has issued directives to police personnel to desist from such methods during investigation and interrogation which can cause torture... In India 'an' entire network of safeguards within a democratic system is available to prevent the occurrence of human rights violations such as the torture of detainees."

"A few isolated cases of torture of detainees can take place as they can elsewhere in the world," he admitted. "Whenever such allegations of torture are made even in the press, there is a regular investigation by a Judicial Magis-

trate and if anyone is found remiss in his duty, proper action is taken... Police personnel found guilty of torturing detainees are liable to receive exemplary punishment."

But critics of the police are not appeased by government explanations. And Indian newspapers have unanimously expressed their outrage over reports of police abuses.

Anil Dharker, editor of the Independent, a newspaper belonging to the Times of India group, believes that 70 deaths per annum in police custody mean "that we really have no right to call ourselves a civilised society." He called the government's response to the AI report as "pious humbug."

Critics say government officials have routinely used the police as an instrument to impose political control. The result is a degradation of an agency which was supposed to enforce law and order.

Critics say the failure of successive Indian governments to control lawlessness in the police force has made it a government in its own right.

Kuldip Nayyar, former Indian High Commissioner in London, said while police atrocities have never been absent from India, they have now become repressive instruments in the hands of a repressive state.

Rajni Desai, a well-known Bombay economist, says, "The police are the armed instruments of the State and, therefore, must be held responsible for the violence they perpetrate on people."

N.S. Saxena, a retired police officer, stressed that the government must hold police officials accountable for excesses. He calls for a major overhaul of the entire criminal justice system including the police and judiciary.

But observers do not think political leaders have the guts to get police officers to do as they are told. Such a demand, they say, would make the politicians unable to exploit the police for purposes of their own. —Depthnews Asia

OPINION

Of Bahauallah and Bahais

This year (1992) marks the centennial anniversary of the Ascension of Bahauallah, the founder of the Bahai faith. Bahauallah (the glory of God) left this mortal plane on 29th of May 1892. A full century has passed since that day and the world has experienced dramatic changes during this period. Bahauallah's teachings have spread far and wide and also brought meaning and value to man's life. The Bahai Faith, founded 149 years ago, has now become a fastest growing independent religion across the globe. On the other hand, the realization of his vision of the inevitable future world unity is now drawing close. Many nations have been united, existing social orders are crumbling down and perhaps humanity is getting prepared to unite as one big family.

Bahauallah was born into a noble family in Iran on 12th November 1817. His father was a wealthy and influential minister at the king's court. Although he did not receive any formal education, Bahauallah displayed an innate deep knowledge and insight from his early childhood, so much that he was offered the ministerial position when he grew up but he declined it as he wished to devote his life in the path of God. He was a kind father to the poor and the needy. As a young man he became the venerated leader of the much persecuted Babi community who were the followers of Bab, considered by them as a messenger of God who had come to prepare the people for the coming of the great Bahauallah. Bahauallah was put in prison and later exiled from country to country. When in Baghdad, he declared his great world mission in 1863. His followers gave up their lives for him and great numbers were slain due to their belief in Bahauallah.

Finally, Bahauallah was exiled to Akka of Palestine, then the

penal city of the Ottoman Empire, the worst existing spot on earth at the time. The weather in Akka was so bad that birds flying over its sky dropped dead. Bahauallah suffered persecution and exile till the end of his life. Yet he wrote more than a hundred volumes in his own handwriting and announced his mission to the high and the low. He sent his historic letters from the same prison town of Akka to Queen Victoria of England, the Emperor of Germany, Napoleon of France, the Sovereign of Russia, kings of Iran and Turkey, the Pope and others: "Ye are but vassals, O kings... He who is the king of kings hath appeared arrayed in his most wondrous glory and is summoning you unto himself. Take heed lest pride deter you from recognizing the source of revelation."

Through the teachings of Bahauallah, a global community has already emerged as Bahais. The Bahai world community has consultative status with the United Nations and the "Bahai International Community" is in fact the first non-governmental organization listed under the United Nations.

Bahauallah's teachings rather address the needs of humanity. Bahauallah teaches the oneness of the foundation of all religions and the oneness of mankind. According to him, religion is one as God is one; God renews religion from time to time according to the needs of each age; just as children go to school and progress from class to class in accordance with their capacity, humanity advances from stage to stage, learning divine wisdom in each age according to its needs. No faith can ever be considered inadequate or inferior. They all serve the same purpose — that of educating man. Only they come in different ages because man needs different teachings in every age. So the spiritual foundation of all religions remains unchanged and

the social teachings undergo certain changes and this is because of our own growing needs and capacities.

"The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens," wrote Bahauallah. Humanity is one. Race and colour discrimination; religious, national and political prejudices must be eliminated. We are all the flowers of one garden. Even though our colours and conditions vary, we belong to the same garden — the garden of God. A garden looks beautiful if there are a variety of flowers in it. Likewise, our world is beautiful because we look different. This difference must not be made the cause of disunity and strife.

Bahauallah has offered to a despairing world his divine and unique principles of independent investigation of truth, equality of the rights of men and women, spiritual solution to the economic problems, establishment of a world government, the harmony of science and religion, and many others.

The Bahai world community is now a community drawn from different races, nations, backgrounds, colours and creeds but are virtually united together, who love making and work to establish a global homeland for humankind. Bahauallah teaches his followers to be law-abiding and loyal citizens wherever they reside and to shun all partisan political activities. He says that the greatest service to mankind can be rendered through promoting unity which is the solid foundation of a lasting world peace.

1992 is a holy year for the Bahai world community as it marks the first centenary of the passing of Bahauallah. This year shall witness great events and grand commemorations across the world, including Bangladesh, where over 50,000 Bahais reside.

M Huda

Motijheel C/A, Dhaka

To the Editor...

"Dhaka Day by Day"

Sir, As a regular reader, I could not fully endorse the views expressed in the letter captioned "Dhaka Day by Day" by Ms. Sonica Parveen Khan in your esteemed daily on June 6. I find her remonstrances based on sporadic and occasional perusal of the column.

The write-ups on art exhibitions, musical soirees, poetry recitals, a birth anniversary of a noted laureate are not the whole of "Dhaka Day by Day". Frequently I find a host of writers, including Mr SM Ali, writing on multifarious burning issues. They write on the plight of house-maids, on development communication, pay tribute to a noble Minister, focus on mis-happenings on the DU Campus, write on sartorial habits, write on Nakshi Kantha. Sometimes a conversation with a top executive of an internationally renowned establishment published in the said column acquaint us with expert views. It is true that the subjects are expressed here in light tones. In my view, the plight of the Dhakaites are ably described. A diverse set of subjects make reading of this column a joyful experience.

I, unfortunately, do not

know any of the writers. Yet, I reserve a great deal of admiration for what they treat us with. Also, I don't know if these people reside in Dharmadi, Gulshan, Banani. But, I am sure they are not writing just only to cater to the interests of any exclusive group living in posh areas only.

"The Daily Star" since its inception has been invariably bringing into focus the pressing issues through other columns too. Ms. Sonica Parveen Khan should admit that "Down to Earth" column by Mr Asim Narunabi, aided by a sharp-witted cartoonist Mr Sharier is not less than enough to depict the true picture of Dhaka. Hope, Ms. Sonica Parveen Khan will take into consideration the saying "Nobody and nothing is perfect but the world cannot remain stagnant in the name of attainment of perfection." Practice makes a man perfect. The worthy and meaningful efforts of the writers of "Dhaka Day by Day" will be able to cater our demands more fulfilling in the days to come.

However, I appreciate Ms. Sonica Parveen Khan's raising of a demand for depicting Dhaka more realistically. It is a commendable gesture. On one

hand her apprehension that "Dhaka Day by Day" would turn into an "ivory tower" stuff seems unfounded and on the other, I believe, the columnists of "Dhaka Day by Day" will make greater efforts to satisfy the demands of Ms. Sonica Parveen Khan as well as our continuous expectations.

Hubert Francis Sarker
Singtola, Dhaka

Help for a mosque

Sir, We the inhabitants of the village Alampur under No. 1 Hazipur union in the district of Magura, beg to say for your kind information that a very ancient and decrepit mosque in the area has been lying almost in ruins. The musallis of the mosque have been suffering for a long time and are offering their namaz in the open field. Most of the villagers are very poor and they live from hand to mouth. As such we seek financial help from the rich people of the country as well as from the Religious Affairs Ministry of the Bangladesh Government for badly needed repair to the mosque.

Mir Farid Hossain
For Masjid Committee of Alampur
PO-Rautara, Dist-Magura