

Bombs at Adamjee

There is little doubt that the horrifying deaths in Narayanganj on Monday, when four men were blown to bits by bombs they were apparently manufacturing, were directly related to the continuing violence and battle for supremacy at the Adamjee Jute Mills. Police sources in the industrial town have confirmed, unofficially, what most newspaper reports have concluded: that the bomb-makers were working for one of three labour unions battling to establish an undisputed control over the factory premises and immediate surroundings — and thus an unfettered access to illegal subscription money from workers besides other perks. The goings-on at Adamjee, not just Monday but for the past five months, represent nothing but the use of terror for political as well as monetary benefits. In the past four and a half months 13 people have met violent deaths and over 1,000 injured. Quite clearly, if an institution of the country could be said to have become a hostage to terrorism, then it is Adamjee Jute Mills.

What Monday's accidental bomb blast showed was that despite the much-trumpeted anti-terrorism drive around the country, and the promulgation of the Suppression of Terroristic Offences Ordinance, the work of the mafia, in industry as elsewhere, goes on unimpeded. The dead men were said to be outsiders, meaning not employees of Adamjee, which again indicated that professional hands are being drafted in to do jobs which the union men are not adept at doing.

Presumably, had the accidental explosion at Kadamtali not happened, those bombs would have been used, probably sooner than we think, in the Adamjee battles. In other words, the protagonists have not felt any compulsion to pay any heed to either the threat posed by the anti-terrorism ordinance, or to the police drive against terrorists. The question that naturally arises is, why is this the case? What kind of backing do the Adamjee terrorists have which allow them to feel that the law would not touch them? We can be certain that if union leaders pursuing violence at Adamjee felt that a police crackdown was imminent, then they would have been forced to re-think their current practices.

The reason for this state of affairs may well be the lack of political will, at the highest level, to apply the law. As has often been observed elsewhere, the involvement of bodies affiliated to the ruling party in violent activities makes the job of the police difficult without clear-cut political direction. In these situations, the arrest of someone even for minor offences becomes politically sensitive, if activists of major parties are involved. This has been one of the major reasons for the failure of the government to tackle terrorism. But the government and indeed, opposition parties, must soon recognise that while a violent approach to politics or patronisation of criminal elements may bring short-term gains, it invariably leads to long-term disaster. Any governing party or party aspiring to political office that fails to put the interest of the law, that is of the nation, above party interest, is destined to lose confidence of the people. It has now become imperative for the home ministry, on the one hand, to allow the police to act in an impartial and firm manner, and deal with violence in accordance with the law whoever might be the instigator. On the other hand, the ministry should give serious thought to appointing an independent, judicial enquiry into Adamjee's affairs. The committee can recommend ways in which the political leadership of the country, including both the ruling and opposition parties, can reform and reorganise their labour unions, to democratise them and make them accountable to their members. We are not quite sure just how deep the rot in Adamjee now runs, and that is why an enquiry is necessary. Administrative measures may well succeed in containing the violence, but may not be enough to cure the problem. A judicial enquiry may be able to identify the inner causes why violence is so readily accepted as a means to political ends.

Disaster in Cairo

The earthquake that hit Cairo on Monday, taking a heavy toll of lives, once again demonstrated several facts. In any natural disaster, it is the poor that always pay the heaviest price. Secondly, despite all the scientific achievements in our contemporary world, we are yet to develop a reliable early warning system to predict an earthquake. Again, it seems, a country or a city does not have to be in what is known as the earthquake belt to be hit by this disaster.

While relief work is in progress, with no reliable figures still available of the damage caused by the Monday's disaster, what is no longer in doubt is that the large number of casualties lived in "rickety old buildings as well as shoddily constructed newer ones" and among children who rushed out of swaying schools. This explains why the earthquake which was said to be relatively moderate in intensity took several hundred lives and left many more missing.

We have seen this happen in Bangladesh during natural disasters. If, over the years, we had built stronger dwelling houses to replace rickety huts along the country's coastal belt, a cyclone or a tidal wave would never claim so many lives.

The disaster in Cairo has also focused attention on problems facing exploding cities. With its present population estimated at 12 million, the Egyptian capital is almost an unmanageable city, with its expanding slums, dwindling civic facilities and virtually non-existent protection against environmental hazards. So what happened in Cairo on Monday may happen in any city during a natural calamity. Herein lies a lesson that we must draw from the latest disaster.

True, there are no easy ways of dealing with problems of such exploding cities as Cairo, Lagos, Calcutta and Mexico City. It won't be long before Dhaka also earns this dubious distinction. But there, must be some planning, however modest it may be, to ensure that people do not live in old rickety buildings and die in hundreds.

We share the grief suffered by the people of Egypt and hope that the international community will respond generously to Cairo's appeal for relief assistance. We also hope that, within its limited resources, Bangladesh will also join in the efforts to give the victims the support and help they need.

It was a great time for colorful clichés and mutual recriminations. From north to South the knives were out as Europe's money markets went cyclonic and 'fault-lines' showed up in the supposedly unifying Maastricht Treaty.

The sky is dark with the wings of chickens coming home to roost," declared former British premier Lord Callaghan. "Money Markets Go Berserk," yelled the Sydney Morning Herald.

"A situation dominated by chaos and incompetence," concluded Milan's Corriere della sera.

The credo of monetary stability and convergence of economies "has now been brutally thrown into question," announced the French daily Le Figaro.

The causes of the crisis are well-rehearsed — over-valued Euro-currencies, "Stubbornly" high German interest rates, uncertainty about the French referendum vote on Maastricht (the outcome was "Un petit oui," a wafer thin majority in favour) and the British governments insistence that sterling would not be devalued, a clear though unintentional signal to currency speculators that this is exactly what would happen. And it did...

Well-rehearsed may be, but with no final curtain sight.

Indeed, much high-level diplomacy, including a planned mid-October summit, will be needed before the uncertainties end and the "benign curve" stability which Euro-business people crave reasserts itself.

It could well be delayed until the Maastricht Treaty has been fully ratified. As yet, fewer than half the 12 EC member-states have done so, though four more are due to confirm their approval later this year.

Denmark has rejected it...

Is Europe Ready for Freedom?

Nicola Cole writes from London

The long-expected explosion over Europe's fragile Exchange Rate Mechanism erupted with alarming speed, throwing currencies, economic policies and political alliances into confusion and disarray. Yet the drama is the most extraordinary ever seen in financial markets and cannot mask very deep commitment to and progress towards a fully-integrated Europe. Special EC summit is on Oct 16

for the present. Britain, which has quit the Exchange rate mechanism, could possibly follow suit unless changes are made in the interests of more equality.

Her European partners want clarification but no renegotiating of the Treaty, which includes provisions for an EC central bank, and a single currency, by the century's end.

Contradictory as it may seem, only one point is rock-solid right now: the total

commitment of EC leaders to the concept of a unified Europe.

This has arguably never been stronger since the Treaty of Rome created a European Community 35 years ago.

One measure of that commitment was the recent threat by Jacques Delors, president of the European Commission, to resign if the French said 'No' to Maastricht.

Another has been warnings from Euro-ministers about the

dangers of resurgent nationalism if progress towards a united Europe is interpreted by officials as a drive for a uniform Europe.

The risks are ever-present they say, pointing to the rise of neo-fascism in France, the attacks on refugees in Germany by right-wing thugs, the "ethnic cleansing" in former Yugoslavia.

World War Two, triggered by Hitler and the Nazis cast a long, very deep shadow.

Although proposals for a federal Europe date back 600 years, they only materialised with economic, defensive and social needs following the events of 1939-45.

Awareness is similarly keen of the need for trading power as the so-called "Pacific rim" countries — notably Japan, Singapore, Indonesia and South Korea (reputedly the world's fastest growing economy) — start or continue to flex their economic strength in Europe.

Japan is already well-represented in the EC, the energy and marketing skills of its manufacturing industries a legend, and it watched the currency crisis with trepidation.

Europe's state of readiness carries from country to country. Overall, much faith is being pinned on the Single Market — an entity larger in cross-border trade than Japan and the United States combined which opens for business on 1 January 1993.

Remaining barriers to the four freedoms of movement — people, capital, goods and services — are due to have been removed between the EC states by the final day of the present year.

The enabling programme is on schedule, with 235 of the 282 proposed directives having been adopted by the decision-making Council of

Ministers and 214 of the already in force.

Substantive matters cover everything from immigration to agriculture, fuel prices to working hours. For the 320 million Euro-citizens involved the Single Market will mean personal freedom to live, work and retire anywhere within the Community. Liberation from frontier controls, cheaper consumer goods and predicted 1.8 million extra jobs.

Businesses will be able to move their money from Malmo to Madrid as easily as from Paris to the Parisian suburbs.

Even now their trucks move freely through the EC thanks to the Single Administrative Document which swept away the nightmare of up to 70 separate forms.

Anticipating a trade boom as well as interacting competition, all major firms and an estimated two-thirds of small-to-medium companies have set up subsidiaries or joint ventures in neighboring or distant EC states.

In a nutshell, the Single Market will spell goodbye to quotas and red tape — and hello to a "People's Europe". The ecstatic spirit of Beethoven Ode to Joy will have been real at last.

Maastricht apart, there are other harmonies still to be achieved — health and safety measures and agreeing which car phones are acceptable, to name just two of them.

Euro-ministers are confident and determined there will be concert-pitch harmony by the December 31 deadline.

— Gemini News
Nicola Cole was staff writer and newsdesk executive on the London Times and Financial Correspondent with the London Bureau of The Australian. Now operates as a freelance.



The sky is dark with the wings of chickens coming home to roost

NGOs and Government: Differences should be Minimised

by Jerome Sarkar

CRITICISM bears good fruits if the critics are sincerely constructive in their intentions. Over the past few weeks a good number of reports and writings against and in favour of NGO activities appeared in different newspapers. The report on the activities of the NGOs submitted by the NGO Bureau to the Prime Minister has supposedly scintillated through the press. I read the reports with interest and often disappointment. Under the circumstances, I feel inclined to share some of my practical experiences, exposure to real situation and feelings.

If one intends to look at NGO affairs squarely, the four parties namely the Government, the people, the donors and NGOs will instantly flicker in one's mind. Fortunately, our present Government is an elected one and unfortunately it has inherited a devastated machinery with acute dearth of financial resources, a perpetual political instability, the policies formulated and dictated by foreign forces as well as very little hope for the fledgling democracy, not to mention incompetent and inexperienced leadership.

NGO Bureau

Ours is a very poor country. We constantly depend on foreign aid. The foreign aids are mostly routed through NGOs (national and foreign). Government having acknowledged and recognised the development work carried out by the NGOs, has set up NGO Bureau. Understandably, the aim of establishment of NGO Bureau has been to support and assist the NGOs in their work by resorting to quick processing, minimal formalities and re-vamping effective co-ordination to resolve their day-to-day problems. This NGO Bureau is further responsible to oversee that the NGOs follow the Govt rules and regulations in the interest of the nation. The recent allegations and counter-allegations often exaggerated by animosity have made in clear that the NGO Bureau and the NGOs do not any more enjoy good relationship. If we are sincere and our aim is development and betterment of the lot of the people, the allegations and counter-allegations will take us nowhere. It simply creates confusion in people's mind. Therefore, a healthy interac-

tion between the NGO Bureau and the NGOs is the need of the hour.

Our people are described as the poorest of the poor by the western world for reasons known to all. They lack all basic requirements such as food, clothes, shelter, education, health and so on. A bulk is unskilled and out of work. Life is beset with manifold problems. We are dependent on foreign aids. Beggars cannot be choosers. So, we have to tolerate many things we do not like and consider unjust.

The governments of the developed world, being enlightened with the lesson that backwardness in any part of the world will finally endanger development in another, have been doing their best to help the developing countries. Since independence, the donors have poured in resources — financial and kind to salvage our country from the ditch of poverty. But nobody seems happy with the results — neither the government nor the people, nor the Donors and NGOs. The donors and NGOs blame the government for red-tapism and corruption, and the government complains about the donor's and NGOs' penchant to override government orders.

Allegations

We often come across the allegations that the NGOs are engaging themselves in converting the people to a particular religion under cover of development activities. Till date nobody could make any headway to confirm the allegations. The government has all the necessary machineries at command to find out and resolve the issue. It's a mystery why the government is keeping mum. However, anybody irrespective of creed and religion should be allowed free will to adopt and practice any religion.

The major NGOs began the rehabilitational work just after the liberation war. Later most of them have taken the shape of development agencies or the catalysts for development. Thus they formulate their activities in commensurate with the government's plans and policies. In this connection, they obtain approval of the government. The government should take all measures to remove and prevent red-tapism and corruption in the government offices, and not

compliance and corruption by any NGO.

Present Condition

Let's have a look at the present condition of our country. Bangladesh is economically a very backward country. For last nine years autocratic regime has rendered the economy further crippled. Present Government is democratically elected and the parliamentary system has been established. It has been in power for less than two years. During the past rule, the country saw a down-hill journey which took place faster and easy, almost destroying all prospect. The fact is that the constructive and development work is an up-hill trip which is hard and time-consuming. So, the present government too needs more time to bring the things under control. However, the present trend does not permit any room for complacency at the establishment of democracy.

Over and above, repeated natural disasters like cyclones, floods, droughts etc have been our regular visitors compelling the country's dependence on foreign aids. The NGO activities have become indispensable in this country. The donors provide the resources and financial assistance to our Government and directly and/or indirectly support NGO activities. It won't be out of place to mention that Government's development budget nearly 100 per cent depends on foreign grant and loans. As opined by the knowledgeable sources, these donors can play very important role in many ways by tying funds to improved law and order situation, establishment of industries conducive to employment and environment etc. In the respects, donors lack initiative.

Complementary Activities

The NGO activities are complementary to government activities and they play a prominent role in realising the government's efforts for development. They cull foreign donations in support of their activities based on government's aims and objectives. The NGOs are accountable both to the Government and the Donors. Thus they are under dual control. They have to follow the instructions of the government on the one hand and on the

another, they have to abide by the guidelines of the funding donors Agencies/governments.

They can therefore work effectively and efficiently only with the sincere cooperation and active support from both — the Government and the Donors. So the pressing need calls for better understanding between the Government and the Donors leading to a consensus regarding the best development policies, implementation and modus operandi which will create a congenial atmosphere for the NGOs to contribute positively to the need of the country. It is encouraging that many expatriates are working in this country with the NGOs. This definitely strengthens cultural exchanges, import of knowledge and technological know-how. We should have respect for their life-style and they should have regards for our way of life.

I spent nearly 17 years in Greater Rangpur and Dinajpur Districts. There I had the opportunity to observe NGO activities such as building clinics and health complex, schools and madrasahs, bridges and culverts. Lunching roadside tree plantations, food for work programme and so on. Many a time, these efforts were implemented in collaboration with the government and the local people. The funds and plans were approved by the government. It is regrettable to mention here that in many cases, the management of the newly enterprises were taken over by the government and were subsequently reduced to the condition of inertia and inoperation.

Govt under Pressure

Usually the government under the pressure from the local elite and political activists in their attempt to gain more power and prestige over the society, resort to such hand-over. Consequent upon failure, it is the government who is put in an embarrassing situation. Therefore, the government should give serious thought before taking over such enterprises particularly regarding management capacity of its representatives/local political leaders.

It is disclosed that a good number of people are suffering

from the dreadful disease of leprosy. An NGO took up an exclusive programme to check the further spread of the disease with curative and preventive methods. The NGO has established a Leprosy Hospital in Nilphamari and extended treatment to hundreds of patients at the out-door. They organise mobile clinic with trained staff who goes around from Hat to Hat (weekly market spots) to advise and treat the leprosy patients. There was another hospital built in Dhanjuri under Dinajpur District with private endeavours where the patients after complete cure are also rehabilitated, if they are not accepted by their family or society. Such activities of the NGOs should be appreciated by all and the government should extend co-operation in this line.

Education

Education is the pre-condition of development. So the NGO built hundreds of schools in different areas with the approval of the Government and in case of primary schools, Government used to share 50 per cent of the total cost. It had been found that the school buildings are the only concrete structures visible in some of the remote areas. These structures were built for multi-purpose utility. This clearly depicts how the government and NGOs can work together for the development of the remote areas of the country.

Road Communication

The development of road communication plays an important role for the economic development of any country. The government's emphasis on infra-structural development made the NGO take up massive programme in this respect and build hundreds of bridges, culverts, roads etc to improve the communication system. At the request from MPs, Chairmen, Union Parishad members, the schools, bridges, culverts, market sheds etc are built after making thorough cost benefit analysis by the NGOs. Here again we see how in trust and cooperation the NGOs and the local authorities work.

During the emergency situations arising out of the cyclones, floods, droughts the local governments always sought assistance from the NGOs to tackle the situations. This further speaks of government's confidence in NGO

activities.

We are all human beings and none of us is infallible. Reportedly the corruption has pervaded every sphere of our life. So, it is not unusual that some government officers and some NGO officials are gaining by means of corruption. Everybody should be on alert against corruption. It is expected that free-wheel discourses, debates, and discussions will ensure what we call transparency of democracy and wther away corruption and misconception.

Free press is the chief vehicle of transparency of democracy. Both the government and NGOs should have the courage to take it in good spirit, though it may often taste like swallowing a bitter pill. However this should not be a mud-slinging business. Instead, it should promote better, mutual understanding.

Interaction

This interaction is a good sign and exercise as long as it knows its limits. It is desirable that the decision-making persons be judicious and cautious for any future move. Let the government spell out in clear terms the rules and regulations for NGOs, and let the NGO Bureau be clear on its stand and cooperative. Let the donors also realise that what is good in developed country may not be feasible in developing countries. Let all shadow of doubts vanish and social justice and peace be established for the greater interest of the nation. It is a known fact that nothing can exist without justice. Since both Govt and Donors aim at a common goal for the betterment of suffering mass socially and economically, we wish both the parties have mutual trust and cooperation and facilitate the NGO activities to continue without unnecessary delay or hindrances for the greater interest of the poor people.

It is in the interest of the government, the donors, the people and the NGOs that the differences should be minimised immediately. As our development is a pressing need, it in turn assures of better future for the whole world. Everybody should remember that it takes all the rich, the poor, the black, the white to make the world and we all are dependent on one another in one or the other way. We need each other.

To the Editor...

Universities and national development

Sir, Universities are the highest educational seats of a country. These are distinguished from the other educational institutions primarily because of the criterion of research which other educational institutions do not necessarily conduct. In addition to teaching, the university professors conduct research in their respective fields and which contributes to the development of a nation. This new knowledge is to be in conformity with the trend of development. Without this addition of new knowledge to the existing volume, a nation cannot keep pace with the new

developments.

It is evident that the universities of our country have not been able enough to meet the above requirements. We have an Agricultural University. The overwhelming majority of our people are engaged in agriculture. But still we could not attain food autarky.

The story of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) has not been better than the above. It is alleged that due to various limitations the students of this university cannot truly be inventive; thus they cannot contribute to the development of the nation to the desired extent. The state of the other gen-

eral universities has been worse than the above. Knowledgeable sources said that the shelves of these universities are filled with research papers but ironically those could not lead the country to development.

To quote from the Holy Quran, "God does not help in changing the fate of any action, until a nation strives for changing its own fate." For the development of any country, the best role can be played by her universities. In our country, the failure of the universities to do so resulted from some controllable factors. To facilitate the students to develop their merit, some new measures could be taken. Not sta-

tistical jugglery but in truest sense, the lion's share of our national budget should be channelled to education to push the country towards development.

Md Abdur Rouf
Sergeant Zahurul Haque Hall, DU.

Well written articles

Sir, Some exceptionally well written articles have appeared in some newspapers lately which deserve special recognition. One such is 'On History and Selective Amnesia' by Quazi M Fazal (The Daily Star, 5 Sep 1992). Such articles might prove extremely useful to the flower-

ing of our culture and values that have remained stifled for so long. If Bangladesh is to ever find its rightful and worthy place in the comity of nations, it first has to learn to see and appreciate life in its own special way. These articles have definitely done so. They have all ventured into the domain where the real genius of this nation lies. Such writings open the way for the national intellect to explore and choose what is best for itself. They also make for better reading than the proliferation of articles written by foreign writers in our national newspapers today.

S M Quader
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Printer's devil

Sir, Despite all attention printer's devil may of course play its nuisance. But if a particular word, say 'convener' appears as 'convehor' always on your esteemed pages, should we take it as the mischief of printer's devil?

Or is it because your contributors are fond of this spelling? We have also our confusion about the correct spelling. Is it 'convener' or 'convehor'? Kindly enlighten us.

Sharnin Rahman
Department of English
Rajshahi University
It's 'convener'. Sorry, if the spelling was overlooked. Edr.