

## More Rohingya Complications

First Dhuapalong, then Dechua and Shaferdeba, and now Nayapara. One after the other, refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar and Bandarban districts are being exposed as free territory for activities of Rohingyas with motives and objectives that are evidently not in concurrence with the interests of this country. Only a few days ago, officials in Cox's Bazaar had told a correspondent of this paper that terrorists were being rounded up, and that a new sense of security among ordinary refugees had given a momentum to the repatriation process. Subsequent events, however, have tended to show that things are rather more complicated than officials were prepared to admit.

For a start, refugees at Dhuapalong camp had claimed, while talking to this paper's correspondent, that many families were being forced to enlist their names for repatriation. Such claims were denied outright by officials, but the prevailing unease in the camps was all too evident.

Now comes another reminder that the security situation inside the camps is not as rosy as officials had made out. The audacity of the militants was displayed Saturday when they did not hesitate to open fire on the police and even injured a senior government official in the process. Quite obviously, the police has not succeeded in either isolating the terrorists from the camps or in putting an end to the flow of weapons into them. This situation bears all the hallmarks of shortcomings in the decision-making process at the political level as well as in actions at the administrative level.

At the same time, Myanmar seems quite content to go at a snail's pace in issuing the necessary clearance papers to potential repatriates. As a result, even though the government had claimed that over 4,000 would be repatriated this week, starting with some 1,700, only 369 were sent back on Saturday. This only points to a latent unwillingness on the part of Myanmar to make the April 28 repatriation accord effective. According to experts quoted in a Bengali daily on Friday, at the present rate, it may take 30 years to send all the 265,000 Rohingyas back, by when 300,000 Rohingya babies will have been born in the camps. The question is, are we prepared to face that prospect? The answer has to be an emphatic no. Yet, we cannot afford to be suspected of acting inhumanely, and throwing poor refugees back. The answer has to lie in the government putting pressure on Myanmar on the one hand, and providing adequate security in the camps without appearing to oppress ordinary refugees. The foreign ministry, which has made much of the 'friendly relations' that are supposed to exist between Dhaka and Yangon, must now demand some dividend on that investment. Unless Myanmar changes its obstructionist ways, the government should seriously consider involving the United Nations Security Council in applying pressure.

## A Lot to Learn from this Modest One

We perhaps did not quite appreciate that a great awakener of man, of the poor masses in the villages to be particular, was recently amongst us in the person of Dr Ariaratne of Sri Lanka. Come to Dhaka to address a seminar, 'the little man' in his modest attire and more so in his bearing, has by a living synthesis of his Buddhist legacy and Gandhist persuasion, so far worked with peasants and artisans of one-third of all the Sri Lankan villages to realise an awakening in the people down there. In the process he has set an ideal which has attracted world attention. Many countries have, however, seen in his work a model of social development that has to be taken seriously, specially in the Third World.

In the subcontinent we had the glory of having the many savants as great awakers of man. In the modern times none other excelled Gandhi in this. Gandhi's great work wouldn't result in any rewarding change affecting the villages. Nevertheless it left an undying echo to rebound from all corners of the earth. Now Ariaratne seems to have taken that echo to heart.

If on the activist front Gandhi remained a wonder-worker, Rabindranath was the philosopher-propagandist of the regeneration of the villages and the society at large from the power inherent within the masses. And Tagore did not wait for someone to heed him but went ahead himself to the job of awakening the masses.

A more direct influence on Ariaratne seems to have been the cultural movement overtaking Kerala in the sixties in an all-in sweep in which students and teachers of science and technology went in their thousands to live with the village people with the idea of sharing knowledge and experience and never dreaming of teaching them.

Ariaratne's exertions are amply explained by the name of his campaign — the Sarvodaya Shramadan movement volunteering labour for a general awakening of all. He got down to doing all that he believed in — starting by sharing in the peasant's toil. The result is for the world to see. No miracle possibly visited his Sri Lankan villages but the work was satisfactory enough to earn him the epithet of an awakener of the masses.

We in Bangladesh, with all our villages dying, are badly in need of one like him. And didn't we indeed have had many like him made rather in the mould of Gandhi or Tolstoy or Marx — our Bhashani and Haji Danesh and Satyen Sen and Amulya Lahiri? There were a whole lot of them, giving their life so that others may live. Their sacrifice and service have evidently failed to bring any change in the life and society of our masses. Why?

It is claimed that many of the NGOs are doing effective rejuvenation work in the villages. We hope this is true. But is Ariaratne their model? Perhaps not. The NGO activists are essentially townspeople taking the light of knowledge and technical expertise into the night that our rural masses and their overall condition represent. And things like 'shramadan' and learning from the masses is hardly involved in their fully paid-for work. There is therefore, much relevance of Ariaratne in the context of today's Bangladesh. We have dismissed Gandhi's vision and life as purely being a politician's. We have turned a deaf ear to Tagore in the belief that his was an act of condescension from on top of the ivory tower. We have instead put our resources to gimmickries like *swanibhar* and *guchchha grams*. Has time come for us to see truth in all its unpleasing visage and to start meaning what we preach? Then perhaps there is a lot for us to learn from Dr Ariaratne.

# Voting by Consensus Violates UN Charter, Say Experts

WHEN the United Nations was created nearly 47 years ago, one of the basic tenets laid down in its charter was the principle of one nation, one vote. China, currently the largest member-state with its population of one billion, was expected to be on a politically equal footing with San Marino, which by comparison is inhabited by some 25,000 people.

By the late 1970s, however, the UN gradually began abandoning its one-nation-one-vote principle in favour of the 'consensus' approach in which a single country can hold up a decision.

But with the UN currently being restructured, there is a concerted move now to revert to one of the basic principles cherished by the founding fathers of the world body.

The charter nowhere talks about decision by consensus, a report by a group of North-South experts said. The consensus process of decision-

making has implicit in it the notion of only one or a handful of countries being able to block a decision, which amounts to exercising a kind of veto.

The expert group, chaired by Muchkund Dubey, a former Foreign Secretary of India, has released a 24-page report which calls for far-reaching changes in the UN system. The 17-member group, commissioned jointly by the Geneva-based South Centre and the 128 developing countries of the Group of 77, also included Adebayo Adedeji, former Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Mahbub-ul Haq, a former Finance Minister of Pakistan and Elliot Richardson, a former Attorney-General of the United States.

The principle of the majority vote, the report points out, was enforced in UN forums where member-states assumed only moral obligations by virtue of being a party to a resolution or decision. But where resolutions imposed specific obliga-

## Inter Press Service Reports from New York

The current procedure of voting employed by the UN has come under fire from a group of experts who have just released a 24-page report calling for far-reaching changes in the UN. Voting by consensus, contend these experts, violates the UN Charter.

Resources like transferring resources and making trade concessions, decisions were almost invariably taken by consensus or without dissent.

However, says the reports, the consensus method of decision-making was never formalised, because it was regarded as a violation of Article 2 (l) of the charter which says that the UN is based on 'the principle of the sovereign equality of all its members'.

The consensus procedure for taking decisions was for the first time explicitly provided at the 41st session of the General Assembly in September 1986 and related to

decision-making by the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC). But there were several qualifications in the resolution which affirmed that the charter provision of decision-making will ultimately prevail.

"Recently, however, all these precautions have been cast to the wind and specific provisions are being made for consensus-making or consensus procedure of decision-making," the report adds.

"This is inconsistent with one of the fundamental principles of the charter, that is, the sovereign equality of states," it notes.

A declaration adopted by the heads of state at the 10th Non-Aligned Meeting (NAM) in Jakarta warns that the democratisation of the international political and economic institutions continues to be hampered by those who seek to preserve their privileged positions of power.

Speaking specifically on the restructuring of the UN system, the declaration says: The democratisation of the United Nations and its bodies should avoid perpetuating the current inequities by creating new centres of privilege and be pursued in the spirit of sovereign equality of all states.

Meanwhile, a Third World diplomat explained that when Western nations were able to garner a majority of votes in the world body in the 1950s and 1960s, all major decisions were taken by a head count. At that time, he said, the West extolled the virtues of the majority vote as the essence of democracy. But as Western nations be-

gan losing their traditional majority to a resurgent Third World, he pointed out, the so-called principles of democracy were jettisoned.

Since the early 1970s, some of the major UN committees, including those dealing with finance, the law of the sea, information, and the Indian Ocean zone of peace, have taken decisions only by consensus.

The diplomat pointed to the 15-member Security Council, the peace-keeping arm of the UN, whose five permanent members — Britain, China, France, Russia and the US — have veto powers.

"If consensus was so politically palatable to the West," he asked, "why is it that the consensus rule was never extended to the Security Council which continues to be dominated by the veto-wielding 'Big Five'?"

— Third World Network Features/IPS

WINDS howled, waves crashed, decks swayed, but aboard the *Maxime Gorky*, George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev laid out an ambitious game-plan for the post-cold-war era. With the dramatic change of East Europe in view the two Super-Powers badly needed a Malta Summit in the Mediterranean sea for reshaping Europe and designing a new era. After a spurt between Bush and Gorbachev on Eastern and Western Values (because Bush desired for change in East Europe as Western Values), the two Super-Powers agreed upon the Democratic Values as their 'propaganda ideology' for the coming new era.

Consequently, Glasnost appears as the Democratic Values as if there was no democracy in the Communist states. Then why are they called GDR (German Democratic Republic), DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), and so on? The communist, the socialist, and the capitalist states of modern time alike identified themselves with the people. The belief that all power comes from God, nowadays, takes on the belief that all power comes from the people. The reason is, modern state is essentially a nation-state. And as Max Weber asked, 'Has not the state appeared all too often and all too successfully to such motifs in order to send young men willingly to die (and to kill)?' Why then are the Palestine Kids at war?

Apparently it appears, unlike Karl Marx, the present day state is, therefore, not a fiction but a reality.

The general historical trend shows that the world has evolved from the tribal society to the nation-state, and the process is still not at an end (the Breakdown of the USSR and the ethnic war in the East Europe could be shown for example). It is no longer possible for a nation on its people to decide in its entirety, as was originally the case in the tribal-society when all members of the community could assemble themselves under the village tree. For all practical reasons it's impossible today for everyone to come together at the same time in one place; it's also impossible to ask everyone about every detail. Because of this, one helps

## The Big Issue is the National Economy

# Can Democracy Say it All?

by Avik Sanwar Rahman

oneself quite reasonably with an elected committee of responsible people, and parliament is precisely that. So the familiar scale originated: Parliament is a committee of the people, the government is a committee of parliament. The notion of parliamentarism thereby appears to be something essentially democratic. Hence, 'Parliamentary Democracy' became the basic prerequisite for the 'Nation-State'.

The rule of the Bolshevik government in Soviet Russia certainly counts as a notable example of disregard for democratic principles. Nevertheless, its theoretical argument remains within the democratic current and only uses modern criticism and modern experiences of the

In democracy, where universal and equal voting rights are made the foundation of the whole, there is only the equality of equals and the will of those who belong to the equals. Neither in the Athenian city democracy (the concept 'citizen' came from here) nor in the British Empire are all inhabitants of the state territory politically equal. Does the British Empire rest on universal and equal voting rights for all of its inhabitants? It could not survive for a week on this foundations; with their terrible majority, the coloured would dominate the whites. In spite of that, the British Empire was and is (considering the Commonwealth) democratic. The

The International affairs mean the affairs among the nations. The Chimmies are getting the upperhand over the Missiles. The world is being entangled with the 'economy'. The 'Big Issue' for any nation-state has become its 'National Economy'. But, how democracy can play its role? Karl Marx once asked, 'What shall we do with political freedom, with empty belly and bare foot?'. Certainly this is the basic question which must arise when faced with 'democracy'. Without economic growth democracy seems to become an 'empty phrase'.

Karl Marx once asked, 'What shall we do with political freedom, with empty belly and bare foot?'. Certainly this is the basic question which must arise when faced with 'democracy'. Without economic growth democracy seems to become an 'empty phrase'.

misuse of political democracy. What counts as democracy in Western European states today is for them only the trickery of capital's economic dominance over press and parties, that is, the lie of a falsely educated popular will. Communism would be the first true democracy. Apart from its economic foundations, this is, in its structure, the old Jacobian argument (i.e. when faced with the authoritative identification of a minority as the people and with the decisive transfer of the concept from the quantitative into the qualitative). When the theorists of Bolshevism suspend democracy in the name of true democracy and the enemies of democracy hope to deceive it, then the one still assumes that democratic principles are theoretically correct, and the other that it is democracy's real supremacy that has to be reckoned with. Only Italian Fascism seems to place no value on being 'democratic'. With that exception one must say that until now the democratic principle has been universally accepted without contradiction.

same applies to other Big Powers. Even a democratic state, say the United States of America, is far from allowing foreigners to share in its power or its wealth. Until now there has never been a democracy that did not recognize the concept 'foreign' and that could have realized the equality of all men. Consequently, democracy results from national feelings. The condition of Eastern Europe — national war against nation — could be viewed as the result of the Glasnost — the democratic values.

So, what comes out? At first there is the nation, then its democratic principle, and to manipulate this it needs an elected parliament — the committee of the people, and then the government — the committee of the parliament — or the state. All in all, it's the nation-state and 'democracy' is beating well because it's the 'heart' of the nation-state as the assembly under the village tree was of the tribal-society.

We are in a world that is simply connected with nations.

factory, and the state are today no longer essentially different. For that reason organisational problems are fundamentally the same in both cases, and democracy is a question not only of the state but also of commercial enterprises.

But a political form of organization cases to be political if it is, like the modern economy, based on private law. The secret of democracy in the economic sphere lies here. Democracy in economy, like politics, means economic freedom; that is, the freedom of individual business, or of the private enterprises; the freedom of the market, the competitive 'market economy', the market that is determined by the producers and the consumers. But the state, as Marx said, 'is founded upon the contradiction between public and private life, between gen-

eral and particular interest. The administration must, therefore, limit itself into a formal and negative sphere of activity, because its power ceases at the point where civil life and its work begin'. To overcome this problem the state has to impose tax on its people. Taxes are the source of life for the bureaucracy, the army, the court, in short, for the whole apparatus of the executive power. Strong government and heavy taxes are identical. So the 'tax payers' need to become conscious for the better accountability of the 'tax collectors' or the state. This democratic consciousness (tax payers) in the economic sphere helped the capitalist nation-states to enhance their national economy.

even go out of their way to keep it afloat. This tempts managers to make unnecessary investments and saps them of any motivation to improve efficiency. But when the US managers, on the other hand, run their companies inefficiently, the stock market knows about it: declining profits drive share prices down ripening them for takeover. It's the threat of takeover which motivates managers to run their companies well.

There are strengths and weaknesses to both systems. The question of whether financial systems should be more oriented towards markets of banks is an important issue for developing countries and the emerging democracies of these countries. At the World Bank conference, some economists argued that a Japanese-style bank-oriented system would be better for developing countries: World Bank staffers who are involved with developing economies on a day-to-day basis, however tend to disagree. They have seen a host of problems with bank-led systems, of which 'soft budgeting' and 'bank loan scandal' are only two.

The question is not likely to be answered for some time, but it is something the national economy has to get to grips with soon — Markets or Banks? The bond market in Bangladesh, like other developing countries, is underdeveloped. The world economy is gradually turning to the 'bonds and shares' which are becoming the principal means of distributing funding. Free-Market mechanisms ensure that it is allocated in an efficient and transparent manner. Emerging democracies of the nation-states must face this problem. So, the sooner we'll practice the 'share market' economy the better will be the prospect of our national economy. Again, 'bank loan scandal' in our country shows that we've to think for change. And, if our policy makers can't decide which way to choose, let 'democracy' say it all, because it is the heart of our nation.

## 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.

### Dhaka city beautification

Sir, The feverish speed with which the Dhaka city beautification is going on which includes installing fountains, breaking up fairly good pavements for redoing, recarpeting otherwise good road surfaces, erecting massive road dividers at fantastic cost — on the eve of the SAARC meeting, is profoundly illogical and wasteful while innumerable important but scant road systems in their terribly poor state are crying for improvement but denied attention year after year for 'lack of funds'.

These works undertaken during the peak hour of the day also causes intolerable sufferings to the public with hour-long traffic jams which is a daily affair in Dhaka. During my travel from UK to Karachi by road, through Europe, I have observed that practically all road repair works are undertaken during the night after 11 O'clock in those countries. Why can't the same be done in Dhaka city at least? By undertaking those sort of white washing whom are we going to impress? The delegates, observes and visitors attending the SAARC meeting are from neighbouring countries who are fully conversant

with our economic status as we know of theirs. In any case can we hide our stark poverty from any visiting foreigner? As soon as he steps down at the Zia International Airport he is besieged by scores of porters, taxi drivers, money changers after he passes through the customs and immigration with bitter experience and what does he witness next? Beggars at every traffic signal, hundreds and thousands of rickshaws, and all sorts of push carts clogging the road and causing traffic jams.

Rickshaw-pulling as a means of livelihood is considered as an index of poverty. Except in Bangladesh, where are rickshaws increasing day by day keeping pace with growing poverty? Other SAARC countries have either abolished this or it is dying out there. The first SAARC meeting was held at Dhaka with such prodigious luxury and grandeur turning this into an extravaganza so much so that the delegates joined to pass a resolution to restrict overall expenditure on the holding of future SAARC meetings.

During early fifties, in a Pakistan High Commission dinner in Australia, costly drinks were flowing like water. Next morning a leading Australian daily commented to

the effect that when the Pakistan economy survives on aid from donor countries whom do they try to impress?

There is another relevant subject I wish to mention. Bangladesh maintains many state guest houses in Dhaka. How many of our neighbouring countries maintain such state guest houses. As far as my knowledge goes, foreign dignitaries are accommodated according to their status in different hotels in other countries except the head of the state Government. Our presidential palace is good enough for this purpose. Should a poor country like ours afford to keep up such luxuries. Has any of our MPs ever questioned how many dignitaries were accommodated in those guest houses during the past two years and what was the annual cost of upkeep of those state guest houses.

S M Uddin  
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

### Condolence

Sir, We are greatly shocked at the sudden demise of Al-haj Shamsul Huda, a senior journalist and well-known columnist of the country. On his death, the country lost a front-line and outstanding newsman. We pray to the Almighty Allah for the salvation of his departed soul and convey our heartfelt sympathy to the members of his bereaved family.

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## OPINION

### NGOs in Population Activities

THE NGOs in Bangladesh have been supporting the activists of family planning in the private sector since the mid-fifties. In the beginning, because of the then government policy the NGOs limited their activities in the urban areas. The NGOs' activities were extended in a big way in the eighties, when substantial funds were made available from abroad.

The NGOs now cover over four million eligible couples, in more than 320 sites — 146 urban and 174 rural (1990). US AID provided substantial support during the eighties. NGOs' role covers a whole gamut of activities, such as distribution, CBD and clinical services, training and orientation, and research and evaluation.

NGOs were successful in the year 1976 in persuading the Government to adopt a population policy. As from then on (1976) the NGOs continued to work more aggressively with the government in making family planning services increasingly available at the community level and in educating the clients and the community in accepting and using available family planning services' (Dr M Alauddin in his paper, NGOs in Family Planning Programme in Bangladesh).

The NGOs now contribute 36.5 per cent to the total CYP in Bangladesh. Over the past few years the successes of the NGOs are rising fast. In the NGOs' project areas, the CPR rose from 19.5 per cent (1981) to 56.3 per cent (1990). This much higher than the national average. The NGOs' home-visit model by the field workers, has also been taken up by the government. The NGOs have also demonstrated that effective delivery of family planning services can

by Shahabuddin Mahtab

turn 'fragile' or 'latent' demand into effective demand. NGOs not only train their own staff but also offer training to the government programme staff. The NGOs have also proved to be most successful in implementing Government's policy of community involvement in family planning. NGOs have done remarkably well in reaching their message because of their close combing operations.

The NGOs have demonstrated that community based female workers are efficient and cost effective and they have provided employment to a large number of women, who otherwise would not have been employed.

According to Dr M Alauddin, the NGOs have achieved significant accomplishments in terms of innovative family planning activities as indicated below:

- Introduction of family planning and contraceptive technology in the country;
- Community involvement and strengthening decentralization efforts of the Government;
- Management efficiency, including effective system of supervision facilitated by all levels of field staff;
- Localizing family planning goals;
- Setting up of a Management Information System (MIS) which ensures accountability within a project for clients, commodities and funds;
- Development of Field Guide for field staff containing comprehensive information on contraceptives and contraceptive delivery, as well as side-effects management, which is now being replicated in the

national programme;

- Training of different categories of programme staff, both NGO and Government;
- Utilization of professional groups and volunteers for cost-effective family planning promotion and delivery of services;
- Involvement of religious leaders in family planning;
- Demonstration that village-based female fieldworkers (including part-time workers) are efficient and cost-effective in the delivery of family planning services, and
- Reception to 2-child families to integrate small family norm into our social fabric. This reception provides an opportunity to give the 2-child family concept national prominence.

The cost of the NGOs are going up, as their activities expand. The funds from the donor agencies may be reduced in the future. In the face of this situation the NGOs have to work hard for future sustainability. One way would be to increase managerial efficiency, and cost savings, and the other to mobilize local resources through charging nominal fees for the services offered/obtaining local donations, etc. etc.

Women constitute 48.52 per cent of the total population, and have an important role to play in the matter of family planning activities. For being successful regarding the above, the women have to be empowered with education and employment. This would lead to a decline in the fertility rate.

For obtaining the best results from the NGO activities, there should be continuous communications and feedback amongst the NGOs, as well as between the Government and the NGOs.