

Human Rights

Man was born free, but everywhere he is in chains, so said Jean Jacques Rousseau. More than 200 years later, the French philosopher might well have been around to see, hear and feel the world at the twilight of the 20th century.

This is the context in which 1992 Human Rights Day is being observed here, and elsewhere. It would be grossly unfair to suggest that things have not improved at all over the past 200 years.

The question of human rights is of paramount importance for not only Bangladesh, but for South Asia as a whole. The days when one could deny human rights in the name of economic development are long gone.

One Cheer for a Minister

Such vindications are very rare to come by. The other day Energy Minister Dr Mosharraf Hossain called systems loss in power straightaway theft.

It takes a lot of guts to own up half as much — or even a minuscule part of it. We are genuinely impressed and record our appreciation of his act of courage.

He has thus gone to the heart of the problem. Let us hope the minister hasn't done only a wonderful exercise in rhetoric and that he speaks responsibly for the whole of his government.

What about the other side of the corruption coin — the consumer who thinks he or she gains by coming into some arrangement with the power personnel — which is obviously the case but only over a very short run?

Euclid, it is said, told his pupil — the Pharaoh — there's no royal road to geometry. We can say as much to the government. It must set its mind to govern, which it is for it to do, or quit.

In the words of Professor Harold Laski, "Rights ... are those conditions of social life without which no man can seek, in general, to be himself at his best."

In other words, certain rights are essential for the growth of every human being. In fact, the observance of such rights is indicative of a society's real progress and development.

Human rights are essential for the development of individuals, nations and the world as a whole. These are necessary not for any particular person but for each and every human being.

Evolution of the Concept

The idea of the dignity and worth of human beings is at the heart of most of the major changes in human civilization. Today we live in a world which has had undergone a series of economic, social and political revolutions.

Human Rights in Global Perspective

UN Declaration Carries Moral and Political Authority

by Dr. Nurul Momen

national level that every human being in every society is entitled as a matter of legal right to have his or her dignity and freedoms respected and his or her basic needs satisfied.

On the question there seemed to be also a general consensus far wider than that of Western civilization. That consensus, in fact, emerges from all the major religions despite differences in their understanding of reality and of human destiny.

In the medieval world, however, in most societies the idea of human rights virtually remained suppressed largely because of the doctrine of divine right that supported absolute monarchy.

lute monarchy. The Magna Carta of 1215, by which the King John of England conceded certain demands of the nobility and the clergy sowing thereby the seed of a future movement for human rights, was perhaps the only notable development in the period.

In modern times, in the 17th century English political philosopher John Locke made some important contributions to the theories of natural rights. He argued in detail that men have a natural right to life, liberty and property.

Despite these developments, both natural law and natural rights were distinctly unfashionable in the years between the restoration of the old order in Europe in 1815 and the rise of totalitarian regimes in the 1930s.

orts to protect the rights of aliens abroad, humanitarian interventions for the protection of minorities, the formation of the Red Cross and a growing recognition of the rights of peoples to self-determination which led to the creation of the League of Nations mandate system after the World War I.

UN Efforts

Born as it was against this background and out of the ashes of the World War II, which witnessed appalling atrocities of Nazi Germany, the United Nations has been naturally interested in human rights right from its inception.

The Charter neither defines what exactly are the human rights and fundamental freedoms; nor does it empower the UN specifically to secure their observance.

Charter itself is bound to have some impact on the human civilization. For instance, the concept of the right of self-determination, which is a basic political right enshrined in the document, has doubtless stimulated the demand for liberation of the colonial areas.

During its initial years the UN concentrated on defining human rights and fundamental freedoms and establishing international norms or standards. Thus the Commission on Human Rights was soon able to prepare the draft of a declaration covering civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Indeed, the Declaration which, in the words of Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt, the first Chairperson of the Commission, comprised the basic principles to serve as a common standard for all nations, is a milestone in the history of human civilization.

Regional human rights structures also operate in Americas and Africa. As early as in 1959 the OAS created the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and more recently the OAU established a similar body which can review complaints both from state — parties and other sources.

After the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the General Assembly, the Commission went ahead to state the obligations contained in it in the form of international treaties. In 1966 the General Assembly adopted the text of three documents prepared by the Commission — The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

To be concluded tomorrow The writer is Professor, Department of International Relations, Dhaka University

Winner Rawlings — the Street-wise Politician

Kabral Blay-Amihere writes from Accra

His schoolmates at Achimota College in Accra and fellow soldiers never imagined Jerry John Rawlings would ever take to politics, let alone rule Ghana.

His colleagues in the Ghana Air Force, which he joined in 1969, remember him as a crack pilot who could 'play God with any aircraft'.

Today Jerry Rawlings is scoring a hat trick in Ghanaian politics by becoming the first leader in the country's short history to be sworn in three times as Head of State.

Rawlings was born in Accra 45 years ago to a Ghanaian mother, Mary Agbotui, and a Scottish father. He attended prestigious Achimota College, which the British established, enlisted as a flight cadet in the Ghana Air Force, trained at the Ghana Military Academy and completed his cadet training in January 1969.

Jerry Rawlings' first loves were flying, electrical gadgets, and fast cars. He married his classmate Nana Agyeman Konadu and they have four children.



JERRY RAWLINGS Pilot who could play God with any aircraft

He took to politics when he joined a group of soldiers calling themselves the Free Africa Club. The late 1970s saw an upsurge of corruption and a decline of the Ghanaian economy during the rule of the Supreme Military Council, which probably shook Rawlings' faith in the ruling junta.

A soldier who worked under Rawlings in those days says: "He was an angry man who felt the senior officers had betrayed the army and the country."

On May 1, 1979 Rawlings entered the mainstream of Ghana's politics when he led a group of non-commissioned officers in an abortive coup d'etat. He was arraigned in court and turned his own trial into a trial against the regime.

The trial was still in its early stages when another group of soldiers under Major Boakye Djan, who has since fallen out with Rawlings, freed him. The Rawlings legend was born that day, June 4, 1979.

From his cell Rawlings rushed to the radio station, announced the overthrow of the eight-and-half-year-old Supreme Military Council, and launched the June 4 Revolution.

Rawlings and his Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) ruled for just three months, during which many Ghanaians were punished either for tax evasion or corruption. Eight top officers of the Ghana Armed Forces, including three former Heads of State, General Ignatius Acheampong, Akwasi Afrifa, and FWK Akuffo, were executed for alleged corruption and crimes against the state.

Rawlings handed over to a constitutionally-elected government, the Peoples National Party of Dr. Hilla Limann, on September 24, 1979, but 27 months later, on December 31, 1981, he overthrew it. He said the Limann regime was not up to the task and had undermined the gains of the June 4 Revolution.

In their first two years, Rawlings and his new government, the Provisional National Defence Council, preached socialism and attacked the West and institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) as the cause of Ghana's woes. But a combination of factors — drought and the deportation of thousands of Ghanaians from Nigeria in 1983 — forced Rawlings to make a U-turn.

Rawlings won 58.6 per cent of the total votes cast — 3,937,783. He "re-assumes" office on January 7. Political observers say Rawlings, who is more comfortable with military governance, cannot succeed in a constitutional era, but he looks determined to adapt to the new situation. Says a cadre of the Revolution: "Rawlings is a survivor, he is street-wise and will make it everywhere and at anytime."

Rawlings is an astute politician. When the ban on party politics was lifted on May 18 he did not declare his intention to run for office. He waited until a few days before the close of nomination for presidential candidates — a move that prevented his opponents entering any electoral alliance.

He resigned from the Ghana Armed Forces to contest the election and stood on the ticket of the National Democratic Congress, a party he is reported to have sponsored. He was backed by another party — the National Convention Party.

In winning the presidential elections he beat Professor Albert Adu Boahen, 61, of the New Patriotic Party; former Head of State Dr. Hilla Limann, of the People's National Convention; Kwabena Drako, 49, of the National Independence Party; and General E A Erskine of the Peoples Heritage Party.

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To the Editor...

Ershad and crimes

Sir, The US Senate Subcommittee headed by Sen John Kerry has revealed that Ershad had smuggled out Tk 2000 crore from Bangladesh with the help of BCCI. This money was donated by donor countries for disaster relief.

This investigation must have entailed time, hardwork and patience of those who did the job. Whilst the US Senate has undertaken this arduous job and completed their findings, one wonder what has the Bangladesh govt done so far about his looting and siphoning off this astronomical sum donated for relief to the stricken and poor people of Bangladesh by donor countries.

cour to these people and exploiting the name of religion to hoodwink the innocent God-fearing people. Our government should request the governments of other countries where he has transferred this huge funds illegally, to freeze the money and return the same to this country. This measure on the part of our government brooks no delay.

tal assassination. Some freedom fighters who claimed their innocence in the plot and its cruel execution were hanged by a closed door court, their fundamental rights of appeal to a high court being denied. The democratically elected government should order fresh independent high powered judicial probe without any delay so that justice is done and real culprits brought to book.

stood on the roads and mused on the wisdom of planting tree in October and November, I was forced to the unenviable conclusion that, perhaps, in the unintelligible reaches of the bureaucratic mind this must have been ordered to compensate for the equally illogical activity of digging up our streets just before the monsoons.

planted? Was there any consideration given as to the soil, climatic and pollution effects? 2) Trees grow deep roots, both vertically and laterally. How will they penetrate concrete footpaths, if at all? 3) What about regular watering? At least 20 saplings planted in Dhanmondi on Road No 2 (opp City College) are already gone together with the bamboo protections (gabions).

allowed to use the good offices of your newspaper to get in an early bid for the contract I will do the job much better (I have over 70,000 trees on show in my farm) at half the above cost. S Sikander Ahmed M M Ali Road, Chittagong

Tree planting in Dhaka city

Sir, On recent visits to Dhaka, I have noted the frantic activity to plant saplings here, there and everywhere as if somebody's life depended on it — and perhaps, it does! As I

Let's be honest

Sir, In speech, almost everyone utters words of principle and show keen concern for the welfare of the country. But in practice, people accept bribes, encourage anarchism and strive for undue benefits. There are only a few who are true patriots. Everybody is quite aware of the fact that without total honesty and sincerity towards our respective jobs and responsibilities, the country will never see prosperity and development.

What species were

Next year, around this time, there will surely be another 'drive' to re-plant these trees once again to replace this year's failure. If so, may I be

M Zahidul Haque

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