

COMMON EDITORIAL

An Appeal for Communal Harmony

A situation of violence and unrest is prevailing throughout the subcontinent following the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya on the 6th December by the organised forces of Hindu extremists. This act has dealt a severe blow to the norms of tolerance, democracy and civilized behaviour. This has severely hurt the religious sentiments of the Muslims all over the world. We condemn this incident in the severest terms. Though belated, the Indian government has already arrested the leaders of the extremist Hindu parties, and has pledged to rebuild the mosque and put on trial those responsible for the dastardly act. Even after that, violence has spread throughout India and over seven hundred people have so far died as a result. We condemn this violence. Right thinking people throughout the world, including those in India, have condemned the demolition of Babri mosque and the violence that has followed. We believe that by rebuilding the mosque and by restoring communal harmony, the government and people of India can bring the situation back to normal.

The spontaneous and vehement outburst across the world, particularly in this subcontinent, against the destruction of the Babri mosque was natural. Everybody has the right to protest this occurrence in a peaceful manner. But we have noticed in the past, as we do so now, that a few interested people, taking advantage of the deep religious sentiments of the simple man, cause disturbances, create law and order problem and carry out attacks on the followers of other religions. The government of Bangladesh, political parties, and all sorts of organisations have, in the mean time, called upon the people to show restraint, maintain law and order and communal harmony. In spite of the restraint shown by the common people, some instances of vandalism, looting of property and destruction of places of worship have occurred. All such incidents are regrettable and condemnable.

Bangladesh has a glorious tradition of communal harmony. We must uphold that tradition. No citizen of Bangladesh can, in any way, be held responsible for what has occurred in India. At this moment we consider it a duty of every honest, conscientious and religious person to resist any attempt to instigate violence and disturb the peace. The need of the hour is to uphold the highest traditions of democracy, humanism and ethical values. We appeal to the nation to maintain law and order and communal harmony at any cost.

Better Deal for Children

James P Grant, Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), during his meeting with Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Minister for Health and Family Welfare, in Rome has recently assured continued co-operation to Bangladesh in its efforts for improving child health and education. Indeed, UNICEF's record on this count has been quite admirable. The UN body's unflinching commitment to child health, particularly in the form of Expanded Programme of Immunization (EPI), has already brought about immense success in the area. Bangladesh, with active help from UNICEF, is poised to effectively tackle the problems of six deadly childhood diseases. The UNICEF's reassurance comes at a time when his organisation is going through considerable fund constraints. We sincerely thank Grant for his concern for child affairs in Bangladesh.

While we express our satisfaction over the UNICEF involvement in our health and education matters, we are not quite sure if the government policies and local initiatives have been equally complementary in reaching as much benefits as possible to the target people. One positive development however has been the drawing up of an action plan by the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) to be adopted by the member countries in their national programmes. The action programme has sought to address some of the most prevailing and acute diseases children generally fall victim to. Specific and common among the SAARC members, the areas that have been taken up for action cover both child health and education. Of the areas, 80 per cent use of Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT), universal iodisation of salt, virtual elimination of neonatal tetanus and even a 95 per cent reduction in measles deaths are targets well within our reach to achieve. Such optimism stems from the fact that considerable progress has already been made in all these areas here.

What however will prove most daunting is the completion of primary school education by at least 50 per cent of all children — girls included — by 1995. Poverty-ridden as the majority of rural families are, it is impossible for them to supply the most basic implements for their wards' education on top of the daily meals. In several cases, the drop-outs are simply attributable to lack of food. In many countries, including West Bengal of India, the rate of drop-outs has been drastically reduced by supplying mid-day meals. Any organisation or government intent on eliminating the drop-out problems must be ready to take up such radical — no matter how costly — programmes. The investment at this level, happily, tends to bring rich dividends for the whole nation in the ultimate analysis. How the UNICEF and the government are going to co-operate in this matter is the most important point. We hope, both will put in best of their efforts which, in turn, are expected to be highly rewarding.

THE US economy is stalled. Japan's is sinking. Germany's is inflated with indigestion from swallowing former East Germany. France battles 10 per cent unemployment and Britain and Canada are wallowing in recession.

Television screens are filled with legions of economic gurus — all with conflicting advice. They "adjust" their forecasts when proven wrong. Economist jokes proliferate. The latest: "Economists can't even get their hindsight right."

After World War II, macro-economic management came to dominate national governments' policy-making, using the GNP and GDP as indicators. Today, current economic theories and models continue to assume "free trade" is good for everyone. "Investment" will trickle down to create jobs, and only individuals competing to maximise self-interest are "rational".

We need a new index for genuine human development and quality of life to correct the GNP and its unreal assumptions. It's time to teach economists that "economics" are not derived from God but are simply sets of rules based on diverse goals and values.

If the world's richest nations, the Group of Seven (G-7), are in trouble — not to mention the former Soviet

Economists Wreck the Economy

With the various economic troubles occurring in the Group of Seven countries, the former Soviet bloc and most countries in the South, and with economists all giving conflicting advice, it's time to ask if economics itself is the problem, writes international development analyst Hazel Henderson, from St Augustine, USA.

bloc and most countries in the Southern hemisphere — it's time to ask whether economics itself is the problem.

What's wrong with economics and why are its practitioners — left, right and center-failing? First, we must remember that economics is not a science. It's a profession and economists are much like lawyers, only with less accountability. Lawyers can be disbarred for malpractice, while economists can create social havoc and environmental damage with impunity.

During World War II, the Gross National Product (GNP) and its domestic version, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), mobilised the Allies' civilian economies for war production. After the war, macro-economic management came to dominate national governments' policy-making, still using the GNP and GDP as indicators.

Economists over-promised

politicians that they could still manage and "fine-tune" societies for economic growth and full employment. The Central Bank of Sweden even lobbied the Nobel Committee and put up the money for a new Nobel Memorial Prize to confer "scientific" lustre on economics.

Today, current economic theories and models assume: 1) domestic national economies still exist and can be managed, 2) these economies still tend toward equilibrium, 3) markets can still allocate resources to satisfy the competing needs for consumer goods, movies, tanks, mass transit, research, retraining, maintaining and renewing infrastructure, 4) "free trade" is good for everyone, 5) "Investment" will trickle down to create jobs, 6) advertising-hyped mass consumption can continue to drive GNP growth, 7) GNP is the best measure of progress

although it short-changes other vital social goals, and 8) nature can continue indefinitely providing resources while absorbing human and industrial pollution.

Worse, economic textbooks still hold that caring, sharing, cooperative unpaid work is "irrational". Only individuals competing to maximize self-interest are "rational". GNP-measured national accounts, skewed by all these outdated notions, steer economic policy.

The GNP still over-values military production, goods, and services and sets the value of educated citizens, children and the environment at zero. Only money transactions are included in the formula while ignoring the 50 per cent of all productive work that is unpaid, such as volunteering, parenting children, caring for the elderly, sick and disabled, or do-it-yourself projects.

Investments in people, standard education and special

educational programmes, such as Head Start, and retraining are accounted as "spending". Maintaining roads, public buildings, and investing in a new infrastructure are also deemed "spending", because the GNP does not carry them on the books as capital assets. It's like running the country as a business liquidation sale. As a result, the United States has a falling literacy rate, an unemployment work force, crumbling bridges and mass transit systems, and the lowest "net worth" per capita of all G-7 countries.

Consumers, relied on to support 65 per cent of the United States' GNP are debt-ridden and broke. Fiscal tools are rendered powerless by sky-high budget deficits. Monetary levers are stripping their gears in today's global capital markets where interest rates attract and repel "hot" money at electronic speeds. Sedate bilateral trade flows are

swamped by the US \$ 900 billion or so of currencies sloshing around the planet every 24 hours.

What's needed are new scorecards to correct the GNP and its unreal assumptions. These new scorecards include the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) and my own Country Futures Indicators (CFI) being considered or adopted in Western Europe, Canada, India, Venezuela and other countries.

It's also time to retrain economists and license them to prescribe macro-economic policy. In reality "economics" are not derived from God but are simply sets of rules based on diverse goals and values. Economists' abstract formulas for "growth" (of what?), "investment" (in what?), "efficiency" (for whom and over what time frame?), and "progress" (what kind?), are all vague generalities, not scientific principles.

Now, more than ever, economists must go public on all this or be overtaken by all the new policy tools and scorecards of genuine human development and quality of life.

— IPS
HAZEL HENDERSON served on the Advisory Board of the US Office of Technology Assessment. Her latest book is *Paradigms in Progress: Life Beyond Economics*.

Human Rights in Global Perspective—II

New Momentum Creates Hope for the Future

by Dr. Nurul Momen

OVER the years the UN, Specialized Agencies and some NGOs, notably the Amnesty International, no doubt took some thoughtful measures for the advancement and safeguarding of human rights but their effects had been painfully slow. In the beginning of 1970s gross violations of human rights continued to occur on a wide scale, particularly in situations of armed conflict and civil strife and in societies characterized by sharp economic and social disparities. As a leading authority on decolonization, Ruper Emerson pointed out: Human rights and fundamental freedom on which the Third World nations based their demands for liberation were being violated in their own life.

However, the mood of disappointment and resignation that had hung over the international human rights movement lifted in the 1970s and gave way to renewed determination and momentum. The reasons for the change in mood were several. With the fall of autocratic governments prospects for human rights improved in Spain, Portugal

and Greece, while India, the world's most populous democracy, voted out two years of repression. In 1975 at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe the Western states succeeded in exacting from the Soviet Union human rights commitment in exchange for political ratification of the status quo in Eastern Europe and increased East-West trade. Only after a few years, despite some unsolved human rights problems of its own, the United States, under President Jimmy Carter, revived American's interest in its heritage of freedom. The US now posed to review economic and military assistance in the light of the human rights practices of the recipient governments. It was also during the same decade in the United Nations the Third World countries called for New International Economic and Information Order and for linking disarmament with development giving thereby a new dimension to the international human rights movement. Further impetus was given to the movement by the UN General Assembly's resolution proclaiming the period 1976-

1985 as "the United Nations Decade for Women, Equality, Development and Peace" and the Unesco's resolution calling for dissemination of knowledge about human rights at all levels of education. To the surprise of many, the two international covenants stated earlier now came into effect and the Human Rights Committee began to work. The decade also saw in many countries a phenomenal growth of NGOs which were specifically meant for giving legal and other aids to victims of violations of human rights.

However, the new momentum could not make much impact as there were some inner contradictions in it. The Western countries, particularly the United States, were vocal about human rights but they were not ready to concede to the demand for a New International Economic Order to redress the existing injustices by a thorough restructuring of the global economy. Again, as American humanitarian goals clashed with its own strategic interests in different areas Washington actually sup-

ported some military and authoritarian regimes rather than movements for democracy.

Thus, notwithstanding the efforts of the United Nations and NGOs, promotion or protection of human rights was not achieved to any appreciable extent in 1980s. Among other things, foreign interventions in Afghanistan and Cambodia, ethnic wars in Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and elsewhere and Arab-Israeli clashes also affected the situation during the period.

1990s and Beyond

A new era of human rights and political freedom seemed to be dawning as the world entered 1990s. Democracy swept across Eastern Europe and the erstwhile Soviet Union. The Berlin Wall came down and Germany was reunified. Namibia finally achieved independence and the policy of apartheid began to crumble. While one-party systems were on the retreat in Africa, reasonably fair elections were held in several Asian countries including Bangladesh and

Nepal. No doubt the surge of hope was brutally dashed when Iraq invaded Kuwait. But the world by then was already a new world — a world free from East-West divide.

As the dissolution of the Soviet Union was announced, the humanity became further free from Cold War tensions. It was therefore expected that global issues like human rights and environment would now get more and more prominence in the world agenda, although at the time of writing this article events in Somalia, Bosnia and India are causing considerable concern. In fact, the Security Council is now seized with the problems of human rights and a world conference on the issue is to be held in 1993.

Now it is the responsibility of all nations and the international community to devise ways and means to advance the cause of human rights in the interest of progress of nations and human civilization as a whole. In this connection, the old question of domestic jurisdiction as well as some new ones concerning strategies and priorities may come up for consideration. It is imperative

to arrive at a consensus on these vital points. To the present writer, prevention versus cure, which has always been a prominent motto in the world of medicine, has the same validity in the area of human rights. In fact, the recognition that human rights violations are more effectively tackled by coming to grips with the root causes of the violations rather than merely dealing with the symptoms has been an important notion in the UN human rights programmes. It is, however, especially important that UN takes the difficult but crucial step of making its investigations of human rights violations evenhanded and comprehensive. For this purpose, an initiative taken by Costa Rica in 1965 to establish a UN High Commissioner for Human Rights deserves reconsideration.

Since human rights are violated only within a nation much can be done to promote the cause also at the national and regional levels. It is important to note that lack of political commitment, not of financial resources, is often the real cause of human neglect.

concluded

South Feels Threatened by EC's Interest in the East

Shada Islam writes from Brussels

The European Community's plans to extend the Generalised System of Preferences to the Commonwealth of Independent States are worrying Third World nations, for it will be at their expense.

"The system is meant for the Third World," one Asian diplomat said. "As far as we know the Commonwealth states have not been classified as such."

Asian experts argue that the inclusion of the former Soviet states in the GSP could 'dilute' the usefulness of the system for 'real' developing countries. EC officials in charge of development policy are also believed to be against changes in the GSP list of beneficiaries.

Some have warned that the Commission's new proposals lack 'coherence'. Only countries which have been recognised as developing nations by the United Nations should be given the benefit of the GSP, they argue.

"The Community should help countries in the East on a bilateral level of course, but not by using a tool of its development policy reserved for developing countries," an EC development expert underlined.

But, others in the European Commission claim that given their economic problems, the ex-Soviet republics need special assistance to sell more of their products in Western Europe.

At a special European parliamentary hearing, focusing exclusively on the political and economic problems of the former Soviet republics, EC Commission vice-president Frans Andriessen noted that the newly independent states would have to make 'sacrifices' to escape their tragic situation.

But, he said the West must support them in this effort. "You cannot believe that three quarters of a century of economic mismanagement can be undone without a long period of structural adjustment and advice."

A recent European Commission report also argues

that GSP benefits will help the newly independent republics to 'restructure, redeploy, and revitalise' their economies.

Following the upheaval they have experienced, the countries which formerly made up the USSR are now facing a political, economic, social, moral and cultural crisis of such magnitude, that it is the Community's duty to use every possible means to provide comprehensive assistance," the report says.

The Commission report also suggests that the ex-Soviet republics be given GSP benefits for a period of three years, while the new government try to 'restructure' their economies.

Just three years or not, the new proposals are bound to strain the EC's already troubled ties with several Asian countries — particularly with the recent suggestions that the region's newly industrialised countries (NICs) could be taken out of the GSP.

The EC has already alienated several textile-exporting nations by turning down demands for quota increases in 1993, while expanding the quotas of some of the East Europeans. And earlier this

year, the Commission said that it was planning to stop tariff preferences for Hong Kong, South Korea and Singapore, as part of a plan to focus the GSP on the poorest Third World Nations.

Brussels officials say that such proposals have been put on ice for the moment, pending the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of trade liberalisation. Meanwhile, developing countries feel more and more that they are getting the bitter end of the stick.

Even the 69 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states which have since 1975 enjoyed a special trade pact with the EC are worried that the EC wants out of the relationship. At the end of their biannual Joint Assembly in Luxembourg in September, ACP officials said the EC had sent all the signals that it did not want to continue the LOME agreement.

"They are sick and tired of us," an African delegate said.

— Third World Network Features

Shada Islam is a correspondent for Inter Press Service, with whose permission this article is reprinted.

To the Editor...

Fitness certificates

Sir, At present, in the metropolis, automobile fitness certificates are required to be obtained from one particular office of the Road Transport Authority and there is always a great deal of rush at that office. Because of long queues, it takes a vehicle one full or at least half a day to obtain a fitness certificate.

Owners of private cars who do not have chauffeurs have to take a day off from their work. Elderly persons who drive only sparingly and who do not have drivers have to employ casual drivers.

As in all advanced countries, nominated garages in several areas could be authorised to issue fitness certificates on payment of a prescribed fee. The authorities could issue guidelines to these garages on the requirements of fitness certificates. Such a procedure will save the time and energy not only of car

owners but also of the police.

At present, after obtaining fitness certificates, vehicle owners have to run all the way to the GPO to deposit the fees. This is a yet another ordeal for the car owners, for it may take another half a day to do so. It is suggested that fees at a prescribed rate should be recovered by the nominated garages which issue fitness certificates and the need for payment of any further fees should be dispensed with. In terms of the cost of time and energy of the police, such a procedure will more than compensate for the loss of revenue to the authorities.

A Gajum
69, Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka

Shifting of thana courts to Sylhet town

Sir, Kindly allow me to ventilate my views on the above subject through the columns of your esteemed daily.

In pursuance of Government decision a number of thana courts have moved to district headquarter of Sylhet. But some have not moved as yet on the plea of non-availability of Government accommodation at the headquarters. But lot of spacious private accommodation is available in Sylhet town at a very cheap rate. Hence it is suggested that Government should hire one or two private buildings and shift the courts to Sylhet town at the earliest. This is likely to reduce corruption to a considerable extent. Because lower courts will function under direct supervision of higher courts. The lower level judicial officers will also be benefited in dispensation of justice because they will be in a position to consult their senior officers as and when required.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury
Fulbari, Sylhet

Let's love trees

Sir, We ought to love trees as much as we love our neighbours. Surely, never do they cause any harm to us. It is also true that they cannot move nor can they speak. But they seem to have some sort of feeling as is discovered by an eminent scientist Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose.

They stand by us as silent friends. Since the beginning of time, they have been an integral part of man's life and his environment. It is amazing to note that a mature tree, for each ton of its growth, releases 1.07 tons of Oxygen and purifies 1.47 tons of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Besides, they keep the earth's surface calm and cool, provide us with food, shade, shelter and medicine, save us from drought, flood, cyclone and tidal bore, decrease air pollution, velocity of noise, soil erosion and thereby help

maintain the ecological balance of this beautiful planet. Moreover, they offer us with charming and odorous flowers as the token of their selfless love.

In contrast, we tend to ignore all the complimentary services of trees. Instead we cut them in thousands mercilessly. We put them into oven as the kitchen fuel and use them as timber for making our luxurious furniture. Seldom do we remember that they render a lot of unique services for the mankind.

Nitin Roy
Fakirpool, Dhaka

Scholarship examination certificate

Sir, Mr Md Robul Islam Hero of Mahisbathan, Rajshahi deserves highest congratulation for his letter under the above caption published in your esteemed daily on 16-10-

92. He has focussed a very significant point which merits consideration.

The students who become successful in the scholarship examinations that are held at the Primary stage (Class V) and at the Junior stage (Class VIII) should have some instruments in hand to show the achievements they made in such examinations of their career. No doubt that for their success in the said examinations they are given some monetary grant as also privilege to prosecute further studies free of tuition fee, there is, however, no certificate for the same. It is earnestly hoped that the relevant authority concerned will ponder over the question raised by Mr R Islam, which if implemented, would be a step towards encouragement for education, very much in keeping with the spirit of the slogan Education for All by the year 2000 AD."

M H Shaikh
Montpur, Mirpur.