

Dhaka, Friday, December 18, 1992

## Repaying Debt to Freedom-fighters

Every Victory Day, a degree of concern comes over us, like a kind of sense of guilt pricking our conscience, about the way we, the nation, have dealt with those tens of thousands of courageous men and women who put their lives on the line to liberate Bangladesh from the neo-colonial rule of Pakistan in 1971. Bengalee Men and Women did not join the War of Liberation in search of rewards, neither did they ever expect to be showered with riches which a poverty-stricken and war-ravaged country like Bangladesh did not possess in 1972 (or, for that matter, in 1992). But what they certainly hoped, and we pledged, was that they and their families would be looked after, because they offered themselves for the ultimate sacrifice in the service of the country, for a cause that was noble.

Twenty-one years after the event, what do we find? We find that freedom-fighters who are still suffering from effects of injuries sustained in the war, are treated as a "burden"; we find warriors having to go from door to door, seeking favours, barely to survive. In the last few days, this paper has published stories of such freedom-fighters, like Abdul Khalik being sent away from the door of the Muktiyoddha Kalyan Trust; like Ali who may go totally blind because he cannot afford to have the second operation needed to his eye injured in the war; or like Khosiqur Rahman who recently lost two daughters to tetanus, because he could not afford to take them to a doctor.

We understand that Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has promised to look into the matter. Although such promises had been made in the past and quickly forgotten as soon as December had given way to January, we certainly hope things will be different this time.

We expect the government will carry out a thorough review of the way the Trust works and the problems faced by not only war-wounded or paralysed freedom-fighters, but all other freedom-fighters who are having to etch out a miserable living in a country which owes them everything but has delivered nothing.

One of the first areas the government should look into is the way in which the 22 companies under the Trust's care are managed. There is every reason to believe that the companies are not being run efficiently and consequently incurring major losses, badly affecting the Trust's ability to meet its obligations. There is a strong case for carrying out a thorough modernisation and expansion of these units in order to make them profitable. This will cost the government a fair amount of money, but it has to be looked upon as a national duty, and the money spent will go only a small way towards repaying the debt we owe the freedom-fighters. The government could also consider turning the Trust into a tax-free operation, while carrying out a thorough investigation into its affairs and root out corruption, from the top to the bottom.

Outside the purview of the Trust, the government needs to encourage freedom-fighters to go into business ventures, by offering interest-free loans, while increasing the current level of allowances for those unemployed or on low income. Another thing that ought to be reviewed is the age limit for freedom-fighters to enter government service, as the current ceiling of 32 years is thoroughly unrealistic. The whole thing, however, has to be approached with the clear understanding that freedom-fighters, disabled, wounded or not, have done their duty for the nation, and now we must do our part, even if belatedly, without any cringing about budget restrictions.

## Stemming the Rot at the Outset

Ramzan, an 18-year-old hawkler from Kamrangirchar on the city outskirts, was murdered on Monday morning near the Kataban slums. He was first thrashed with hockey sticks and lashed with a chain before being stabbed to death on the heart-of-the-city Sonargaon Road at 8-15 with a thick pedestrian and vehicular traffic standing witness to the gruesome act. It has been strongly suggested by circumstances and also by knowledgeable people that the criminals were certain they would get away with the murder and come to no harm. This is not at all surprising. Rather such cases are all too common. But the gang of three who slew Ramzan were not politically connected. They are, suggest press reports, men having a different connection — a connection that gives an equally effective umbrella against law. Our burgeoning underworld drug mafia can provide such immunity against punishment as can be deemed more powerful than those given by the political *murabbies*. It is a wonder of wonders that police have not yet seen anything in the recent spurt in the frequency of city murders that can lead them to find in it a drug connection. Mugging and so-called hijacking and other assorted kinds of *mastani* are caused by addicted youth to pay for their puffs and shots. But these boys are nothing compared to the purveyors of the drugs who have so far succeeded in stopping police from uncovering the working of the drug operators and the crimes they resort to keep their business running without a snag.

The man caught by police as one who made the fatal stab on Ramzan, Abul Kalam, is also described by certain reports as a police informer. The realities of Dhaka graduating into a crime megalopolis easily persuades one not to see anything unusual in that. The impunity with which drug traffickers are prospering and proliferating tend to give credence to the popular belief that if political parties harbour gun-toting goons, the police, a world by itself and unto itself, harbour the drug mafia and their men. No killer with a drug connection has so far been nabbed not to speak of being punished. Why?

Above is an exercise in speaking in general terms. Talk to the residents of houses in the Kataban and Babupura slums, for a beginning, and you will get all the specifics. This is not helpful for the image of the police — and police, to be police, must have an image that evokes confidence in the mind of victims of crime and bullying.

The drug thing has not yet gone completely out of hand. If the police remain unpurchasable and committed to duty, the first saplings of the poison tree can be uprooted without much ado. Police's failure to contain, and subsequently eliminate, the drug crimes and the overall drug threat, will have very rudely adverse effect on the capacity of the government to govern the country. Let government take the above as a timely caution.

THE period we are living in is the one of all transitions: Dogmas, certainties, what I might term 'received policies' in the way one says 'received ideas' are being called into question. We have to radically review conceptions of development and reshape practices, that, in the view of many experts had made of the 1980s a 'lost decade' for development. However, at a time when faith in economic growth alone has lost ground, the notion of human development has gradually taken hold. At the Earth Summit, the concept of sustainable development was given the stamp of approval by the international community. Now, everyone is starting to be aware that development, while it presupposes growth, cannot be reduced to mere economic development, and that the key to preserving nature is culture.

A new kind of development — human, sustainable and shared — is necessary. But it can only be built on the basis of new approaches, policies and practices, which will flourish only if the links between culture and development are explored and strengthened. Nevertheless, while those are more and more clearly perceived, they have yet never been analyzed in a global and co-ordinated way world-wide. By filling this gap, our commission will further the efforts of the international community to promote another kind of development in all its different dimensions.

If development, indeed begins in human culture, both in humankind's material culture and in its symbolic culture, it

# Towards a New Kind of Development: THE CULTURAL CONTRACT

by Javier Perez de Cuellar

Star Exclusive

must also lead to the cultural fulfilment of each and every one. For it is culture that is the source and ultimate goal of development, which gives it its impetus, its quality, its meaning, and its enduring foundation, and that informs the promises of tomorrow. The cultural dimension of development today assumes all the greater significance since culture and knowledge are tending to occupy an ever more important place in production, the economy and indeed all human activities. It is, moreover, culture that moulds our acts and our patterns of behaviour. For it includes not only the physical or symbolic heritage, it is not mere *civitas* commerce with works of the mind, it is language, thinking, innovation, creation, critical discernment and action that exerts an impact upon the world.

Any development effort that is not founded on the rich creative potential that culture offers is therefore liable not only to be doomed to fail, but also to impair the diversity of cultures and their dynamism, which is nourished by exchange and by dialogue. Moreover, a new kind of development can only be established if, both prior and subsequent to policy-making, attitudes and life-styles are radi-

cally evolving, which in turn must entail genuine cultural changes. The conclusion of an authentic social and moral contract, or even of the "natural contract" evoked by the French philosopher Michel Serres, thus requires the conception of a new pact: the cultural contract.

At a time when the world is divided and very frequently rent, between integration and disintegration, it is patent that not only the problem but also the possibility of solutions lie at the meeting point of culture and development, whether the goal be to ally ethnic and inter-cultural conflicts, to combat inequalities or to defuse the tensions between the globalization of phenomena and the fragmentation of cultural and political consciousness. What is at stake today is the nature of the links — currently undergoing a metamorphosis — between the global, the national and the local levels, between what is universal and what is specific, between growing interdependence and the protagonists' no less swiftly mounting determination to achieve autonomy and independence.

It is apparent to all that cultural and ethnic conflicts cannot but be exacerbated by development and culture, by following separate paths, con-

demn one another to failure and if minority or indigenous cultures do not enjoy effective protection within the framework of States in which the rule of law prevails. Peace is no more than a fragile respite wrested by diplomacy if it is not based on development with a human face, on a genuine culture of peace. A concrete lesson, moreover valid for all continents, should be drawn from the tragedies which rend ex-Yugoslavia or the republics born of the dismemberment of the USSR: the map of the "war of cultures", which has substituted for the bi-polar order of Cold War, almost coincides with the map of under-development, which also sets fire to urban ghettos of rich countries. I am convinced that the work of our Commission will further the comprehension of such problem and should have positive influence on the decisions and practices of the main partners, and consequently on peace.

We should not forget that education and democracy are the twin offspring of culture and development; democracy's most effective shield is educated and responsible citizens. As Plutarch pointed out long ago, "The city is the best teacher." Education, which is, as science, an essential dimen-

sion of culture, is first and foremost a long relationship with cultural, economic and social development. It is a cultural issue, before being a technical question.

It is clear that we must take up an unprecedented challenge. For we are living through a Copernican revolution in development. But it is a Copernican revolution in reverse, since it is humankind and its culture — its cultures — the Earth and its nature that are now returning to take their rightful place at the hub of the world system. In this perspective, the work of our Commission will doubtless mark a major step forward in international thinking on development, and above all to move from prescription to practice. For it is not enough to repeat that the cultural dimension of development must be taken into account: it is also necessary to say how. The World Report on Culture and Development, prepared by the Commission, will be action — and policy-oriented.

Our Commission is required, in a spirit of dialogue, to associate all the partners concerned with its work. It will hold consultations and public hearings in the different regions of the world, and will collect views and advice of leading figures, policy-makers,

creative people and intellectuals, and of the best experts. It will need assistance from everyone, but also the solidarity of all, since its work is financed, as that of the Brundtland, Brandt or South Commissions, by voluntary financial contributions. Norway, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland have already taken firm commitments in this respect, so far amounting to some US dollars 1.5 million, which corresponds to more than one third of the budget estimate (US dollars 5.6 million). I wish to thank them all. It is necessary for others to now join this challenging enterprise.

Moreover, the international community, by a decision of the UNESCO General Conference, has invited Member States, international financial institutions, development agencies and private foundations and corporations to contribute financial and in-kind support for the Commission's activities.

It is essential, as much from the symbolic as from the practical point of view, that this call be heard in the North and in the South. Indeed, culture and development have to be everybody's concern if we want them to become everyone's chance and share. I should end by paraphrasing an African proverb: culture and development, like love, are the only things that grow when they are shared.

The author, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, is President of the World Commission on Culture and Development.

## Vote for Women Priests Brings a Sword Not Peace

Edmund Blair writes from London

The vote by the Church of England favouring the ordination of women may prove one of the most damaging decisions in its history. Some priests are talking about switching to the Roman Catholic Church. As well as threatening schism, the vote also damages the measure of unity established with Rome. But for the Anglican provinces worldwide, the decision may be the leadership they expect. Gemini News Service examines the trauma facing the Church of England.

THE Church of England is bracing itself to face the reaction of those who oppose legislation letting women be ordained as priests. Several members have already announced that they are leaving the Church.

The General Synod ended a debate lasting 27 years by voting in favour of the legislation. A two-thirds majority was needed in each of the Houses of Bishops, Clergy and Laity. Attention was focussed on the House of Laity where opposition to the motion was greatest.

A "dry run" vote on the issue in July had achieved only 61 per cent support. On the day the House of Laity voted with just five votes over the two-thirds required.

Pleas went out from the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, for quiet reflection before any "precipitous action" was taken. Almost immediately after the vote Anne Widdicombe, a Member of Parliament, said: "There will be grievous division which I do not see resolving itself." She announced she would leave the Church of England and consider joining the Roman Catholic Church.

Some of the strongest opposition has come from the Anglo-Catholics. They believe that the Church of England will become divided within itself and has broken the degree of unity established between Rome and the Church of England. Rome is not contemplating ordaining women. Many feel that he progress made by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) has now been torn apart. They also believe agreement with the eastern Orthodox churches has been damaged irreparably.

Chief Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said: "This decision by the Anglican

Before vote on women priests	Ordination	Bishops	Clergy	Laity	Marriage	Other
Church of England	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Roman Catholic Church	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Methodist Church	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Church of Scotland	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

community constitutes a new and grave obstacle to the entire process of reconciliation."

Arthur Legat, General Secretary of the Church Union, fears damage from the Synodical decision will extend to the worldwide Anglican church. He said: "Anglican Churches are already in a schismatic state where women have been ordained, such as in America or Canada. This legislation will divide the Church of England. It will deepen further the split that already exists in the Anglican communion."

The Anglican Church, of which the Church of England is head, includes 30 provinces worldwide. In 16 provinces (including the Church of England) women have either been ordained or legislation has been passed allowing them to be ordained. Within the next two years a further three provinces, Scotland, Wales and

Japan, will debate and vote on the issue.

The potentially divisive nature of the issue of women's ordination has become real in the Anglican Church of the US. In America women have been ordained for many years and some are now bishops. American Anglicans against women priests have reacted by founding the entirely separate "Continuing Church".

Whether the Church of England will experience a schism similar to that in America is questionable. In America the dioceses normally possess their own churches and vicarages. By splitting from the main body of the church, traditionalists in America do not lose their place of worship. Not so in England. The traditionalists, for whom the church ceremony is so important, would lose their church from a schism. An almost im-

possible move.

A schism would be easier among those evangelicals opposed to women's ordination. They would be more prepared to congregate in a place other than a church should they decide to break away.

It has been a difficult debate throughout the Anglican provinces that have taken the step to ordain women. The Anglican Church of Southern Africa voted in favour of ordaining women priests in August, but no without fears of schism. At the start of the debate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu asked Synod: "Wouldn't it be wonderful if especially South Africa could see that we disagree, and disagree vehemently, and yet still remain friends?"

In England the debate has had a chequered history. The motion to allow women to be ordained was first put before the Church Assembly — the predecessor to the General Synod — in 1966. It was not passed.

In 1975 the General Synod found "no fundamental objections," theological or other, to women being ordained to the priesthood. This motion was carried on a simple majority. But to legislate requires a two-thirds majority. When the legislative motion came before Synod in the same week it was again rejected.

The last time the motion was put before Synod was in 1978. Again it suffered defeat.

Some believed another defeat this time may have created greater problems.

Father Gary Dowsey, a Roman Catholic priest, expressed concerns before the debate that a vote against would be more divisive. He said: "What worries me is that different parts of the Anglican communion are doing different things — some ordain women, some do not. This will harm the Christian message of reconciliation and unity."

Many Anglican provinces were looking to the Church of England for a lead on this issue. Mark Santer, the Bishop of Birmingham and co-chairman of ARCIC, recognised the need for sending the right message to the worldwide Anglican Church. He said: "The

fact is we are concerned for communion with all our fellow Christians, including our fellow Anglicans, who ordain women and not only with Rome."

For some provinces the question of threatening links with Rome will not be their greatest concern. James Rosenthal, of the Anglican Consultative Council, believes the Church of England has now put itself at the heart of the Anglican community — where it should be as the mother Church. He said: "Only Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka are particularly concerned with ties with Rome but it represents a minority opinion in the provinces."

Rosenthal sees the move as a significant and inevitable step forward. After the debate he said: "Historically as of yesterday the Church of England has joined 50 per cent of the Anglican communion in the expansion of understanding of what is meant by priesthood."

Whatever that understanding, the Church of England must now learn to live with the division it may bring.

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## OPINION

### Act of Savagery

M. Rashid Ahmed

Bewildered or bereaved, the savagery exhibited in the People's Republic of Bangladesh in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid incident cannot be overlooked under any pretext. It is not the illiterate commonmen who has indulged in the heinous acts of attacking places of worship of the Hindu community, but the half-literate frenzied hoodlums believably patronised by their literate mentors. Things took a turn for the worse although checked, but belated and mismanaged it serves as a serious signal to the potential danger to which the nation has to be on the guard.

The Hindu revivalist parties of India who have calculatively incorporated religious fanaticism in their manoeuvre, may think they have nothing to lose in the long run in being able to draw the numerical strength from their community — advancing the communal basis of the Indian integrity at the cost of human civilisation. They are a disgrace to their ancestors of European breed bringing themselves apart with Nazism, Fascism and apartheid. It is not the places of worship they or their Islamic counterparts revere, but a suitable template for mean political benefit — no matter whether it jeopardises the lives of teeming millions, brings in disharmony and distrust and brings all human achievements to the brink of disaster.

In Bangladesh, the initial reaction of peaceful protests may be understood. But how one is to explain the attack on temples, plunder of business houses and burning of home-steads? No commonmen ever lent support to such heinous acts, to leave aside committing the crime. And that too went for days together bringing in shame to the nation. Political parties propagating democracy and secularism were at par with the religious and fundamentalist parties in their mastery in inactivity in checking the crimes. Party in position to opposition all failed to pro-

nounce appropriate denunciation of the anti-human and anti-motherland acts. They were with rhetorics for harmony and have only exposed their apolitics of washing off hands of their duties to the nation.

In perhistoric time the savages took to violence only when driven by the instincts of hunger and self-defence, having no pretence or hypocrisy. With the gradual evolution to civilisation the presently homo sapiens take off ground to higher form of creativity and construction. How can one ever explain the lecherous dirty man — the modern savage — bringing in death and destruction? Then what has modern education, science, philosophy, culture and humanism imparted on them? How can one claim himself as a civilised man when his psyche and socio-political systems has fanaticism as its integral part?

If places of worship are for man's spiritual nourishment, then why these have malnourished him to the extent of dehumanisation? Still the illiterate people like the virgin soil are humans, but not many of the literate but uneducated. The latter, often turn into treacherous modern savages and are at the helm of the affairs.

This brings forward the question of our capability to govern ourselves. It has put into question our political, social and educational systems, and exposed their virtual hollowness. Do we need to sustain them? These questions are to be answered, without any sidetracking.

Our professionals, workers, intelligentsia, cultural activists all have to realise their mediocrity. Moral courage, ethics and sense of direction to be evolved anew and intellectual decay and bankruptcy to be reckoned to make a fresh start.

The creators of civilisation have to stop the modern savages or fall prey to them. Stop them now, and once and for all.

## 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.

### The diversion

Sir, After going through the forceful and clear opinion of Syed Siddique Hossain ("Dr Kamal Hossain and the Third Force", Star, Nov 24), other thoughts arise, not covered by the correspondent.

The presence of Dr Kamal Hossain at this juncture appears to be incidental, speaking philosophically and objectively (the details come later). It could have been any other personality (trying to catch a floating straw in desperation).

The political situation has reached a stage when the people, frustrated and desperate, are seeking a diversion out of the BNP-AL impasse, which is likely to continue indefinitely (two years is a long time to judge a situation). One theoretical alternative is a coalition government. In the present set-up, it is unlikely. The other is a mid-term election, which is costly for the young nation, in more terms than that of money.

There are many who look to the Awami League, on the basis of the track records, to provide the right kind of leadership, based on pragmatic programmes, and not on past

sentimental attachment, to project a clear picture of the urgent tasks faced by the nation in the years ahead (any party consideration comes second, regardless of the name and fame of the party). The problem is that quite a number of political workers think that the current AL is passing through a leadership crisis, and the focus on the future is fuzzy, looking from the outside.

Historical lessons cannot be ignored or brushed aside. That political parties come and go is an accepted reality. How to keep a party alive is a separate issue. Looking at our own history during the current century, a number of powerful parties have practically ceased to exist, which can be explained historically.

Therefore the current mood of trying to seek a solution by alternative means is understandable. There could be difference of opinion on how to go about it. The use of the expression third "force" might be misleading. Perhaps a better term would be a "movement" to put pressure on the leading political parties to come to terms in national interest. We hear a lot of ser-

mons, without any crystallization of effort. The political leaders have to rise above the despondent public reaction, and really lead the nation out of the woods. The crisis in leadership, in general, is ominous for fragile and newly democratic Bangladesh.

Alif Zabr  
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### Electricity bill

Sir, I pay tax, I pay for my electricity that I consume, I pay for my calls that I make over my telephone, I pay for water and gas that I use. I have lived all my life in rented house because I could not afford to build one or buy one. I have tried my best to be very regular without being a defaulter in my payments and for that matter, never have I given a chance to any one to brow beat me on this count. But as the years roll by I feel that in some spheres of my life and activities I am facing hazards.

For instance, take the case of payment of electricity bills where self billing is done. I do not get the Bill Book easily. Every time the pages are utilised, one has to go to the office of the concerned Executive Engineer, in my case his office is located in Lalmatia behind the Fire Brigade. Instead of giving a full booklet only a couple of pages are added to the booklet so that one has to visit him every two or three months. I re-

member, on most occasions I had to waste more than three hours running from one person to the other to get a few pages. This I am to face at least 4 to 6 times a year. I am a senior citizen running 70 plus but the behaviour meted out to me was not only harsh but definitely rude. What have I done to deserve this? There is a definite motive behind this or it is a motive hunting for a motiveless malignity. But books could be printed in bulk and supplied generously to the subscribers who pay the bill directly and do not take the help of 'dai number hera feri,' or is it taking the stag to the bay?

Now we are living under a democratic rule, honesty and desperately trying to introduce democracy at all steps ignoring all hurdles from different doors. Everyone should be vociferous where the system is made to fail. In spite of Finance Minister having made a statement on the floor of the House regarding Jamuna Surcharge, they continue to charge it, (they say erroneously) from the tax payers. If they had erroneously charged, it should have been refunded.

When do they plan to refund the Jamuna Surcharge and honour Finance Minister's commitment in the House? The authorities may like to give it a thought.

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