

Hell that Broke Lose in Chittagong

There is an usual reticence in the media in Bangladesh about writing on affairs relating to the armed forces. Reasons for this reticence is somewhat obvious. But when something like what has happened in Chittagong three days ago, the mass media in a democratic country has to speak out. It has to speak out as a matter of right, as a part of institutionalizing democracy, to assert the superiority of the people above all other bodies and to establish a system of accountability that is the very soul of democracy. It must also speak out to safeguard the image of the armed forces itself. To state it simply, a section of our naval personnel have committed what is perhaps the gravest crime in the book — they have attacked the very people they have taken a sacred oath to protect. And this they have done in retaliation of public outrage against acts which themselves are socially dispicable, morally reprehensible and legally punishable under any court of law. Individuals or groups taking up law in their own hands is a sure recipe for anarchy. But when a section of the armed forces — in this case the navy — does the same, the situation is far more dangerous. It is so because the feature that distinguishes the civilians from the armed forces is discipline. Command and control, the key with which commanders, starting from the general down to the lieutenant and non-commissioned officers run an army, depends entirely on the discipline of the men in arms. All this has been brought into serious question in what happened in Chittagong.

While we welcome the move of the government to set up a judicial inquiry, and the move to compensate the victims of the incident, there is lot more that needs to be done. Parallel with the judicial inquiry, there should be investigation by the naval and defence forces. At the end of this investigation there should be court marshalling of those who are found guilty and given exemplary punishment.

How could a section of naval personnel break all codes of behaviour, take out weapons and ammunition, from the armoury (opening of which requires all sorts of special permission) leave their barracks and go into the area of the incident without triggering the security alarms that are an integral part of such a body. What boggles the mind is that, it was not one sweeping angry outburst that we are talking about, but an encounter that continued for more than 20 hours. It speaks volumes of the naval commanders of all levels who could not restore their command over their own men. What sort of a chain of command is there, that stood helpless while the rampage was on?

Then there is the question of the psychological make-up that made the navy men do what they did. Obviously these naval personnel felt that they are above the law and how dare "bloody civilians" touch their comrades, regardless of what they may have done. We in Bangladesh are not strangers to this mentality, but had hoped that with the advent of democracy this legacy of autocracy, and of long years of military dictatorship, has also been thrown into the dustbin of history, along with these nightmare years. It was this mentality that lay behind the past military takeovers and perversion of democratic growth. We would like to believe that this is not a mentality pervasive among the majority of our armed forces. But the Chittagong incident shows that it maintains a powerful hold in at least some section of them.

Not only the perpetrators of this crime, but the very root of it that gives birth to such acts, will have to be eliminated. It is necessary for the betterment of our armed forces and for a healthy growth of our democracy.

Saving Somalia Needs Strong Resolve

Just when the prospects of order being restored and relief reaching to the famine-struck Somalis were looking bright, the UN-blessed Operation Restore Hope has received a big blow with the killing of Briton Sean Devereux, officer in charge, UNICEF, in Kismayun. The UNICEF, which has so long carried out its relief programme in the famine-fested and war-torn Somalia quite creditably, has pulled out its foreign staff from the port of Kismayun after the tragic incident. While we strongly condemn the killing of a man who had been engaged in a humanitarian mission and express sympathy to the UN agency and Devereux's family, we beg to differ with the decision to withdraw the UNICEF staff.

No doubt, assurances for the security of UNICEF and other NGO staff cannot but be a precondition for any provision of assistance in Somalia. But if the 27,000 US and other foreign troops now engaged in ensuring the relief distribution among the badly affected Somalis in outlying areas cannot guarantee aid workers' safety simply because of bands of gun-toting looters and thugs, the UN peace effort and relief work are certain to get bogged down. This cannot be allowed to happen. The UN troops' mandate needs to be expanded to the extent that they are empowered to disarm the Somali bandits.

This measure ought to be taken not only to stop the armed gangs going along with their way of looting but also to avoid future clan wars in the country. To avoid further tragedy, on top of what has already been wrought by the country's apocalyptic famine and bitter feuds, the UN intervention now has to match the challenges facing its mission. If the Somalis in general welcome the move, there is no point hesitating over its implications for nations at war with themselves elsewhere.

Somalia's problem is that it had gone through similar tragic experiences not long before but has learnt no lesson. With a very low rate of literacy, it has not much of a chance to get over the present crisis. The tribal way must have to be replaced by a strong central authority for governance. Somalia needs international help for a long time to come. The human loss suffered by the East African country will have left its adverse effects on several generations. A long-term assistance for the country should be well in order. But aid agencies' withdrawal will surely sound the alarm bell, leading to mounting problems for the Somalis. The UN has moved one step ahead, it should not mind taking the giant stride for a humanitarian cause.

Domestic or Foreign — what is the Name of the Game?

WE have been encouraging foreign investment for quite some time now. The results have been poor. Total foreign investment actually made in terms of buildings and hardware during the last ten years will not be equal to the annual investment flow in any of the ASEAN countries. This led to my suggestion last week that we should initiate foreign investment in Bangladesh through attracting those multinationals who were active in the past in our country. This would then create the conditions for others to follow; including overseas Chinese — the prime movers of Asian growth miracle during the last two decades. But domestic or foreign investment — how growth itself should be promoted and who should do it must be made very clear.

We need foreign aid, considered more important than foreign investment, to promote economic growth since domestic savings are so low. The additional goods and services produced because of the aid or investment must be sold abroad since the domestic market is so small. According to this argument growth could therefore originate only from external or foreign factors. On

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the other hand, one may also argue that if domestic investors are shy in their own turf, why the foreigners should come and invest? Why they will set up a factory to manufacture products for sale in their own home market? Above all, foreign aid, as opposed to investment, cannot promote growth if we ourselves are committed to short-term private gains instead of the vital, long-term growth aspirations of the nation as a whole. The key question boils down to domestic or foreign, what is the name of the game?

Throughout the Ministries of the Government or the business houses at Motijheel, the development business primarily means and includes designing the appropriate projects for seeking foreign aid to the maximum extent possible; and the purpose is not to promote growth of the economy but secure the individual gains for the targeted few. As a consequence, an interesting process has evolved where individual gains could be heightened if the import content of

the project is high. As for example, Railway imports more engines and carriages while the objective should be better maintenance, skill development and local manufacture. Inevitably, massive losses and huge import through investments go hand in hand. The same story could be repeated times without number and the

project is high. As for example, wheat in particular under food aid is not only to meet urgent shortfalls in our harvests. Government sells the grains to generate cash resources for the budget, which again perpetuates the inefficiency and corruption of our Tax Departments. Not only that, when there is a bumper harvest,

that foreign is the name of the game in Bangladesh today which will continue to ensure that we very effectively retain our status as a least developed country. A former finance minister of Bangladesh who in the past, on numerous occasions, headed the national team negotiating billions of dollars worth of foreign assistance now-a-days feels so desperate that according to him all foreign aid should be banned as the first step towards national development. There are both uses and abuses of foreign aid. We seem to have put our entire faith on abuses only. And, it is ourselves to be blamed for it — not foreigners because the option to refuse is with us at all times.

The former minister's present conviction has evolved out of total frustration. It is not a question of whether one could agree with him or not, but the fact is that the massive flow of aid each year since 1970s have now made us so dependent that we have locked ourselves in a kind of national slavery and degeneration. The time

has come for a national salvation movement to free ourselves from corruption through total dependence.

What we must do is to work out the indigenous basis for development: the name of the game must be domestic first and foreign second. But it may be true that in order to timely establish the indigenous basis for development, we may have to deny ourselves of foreign aid and try to rely on our own resources, as far as possible in the short run. After we have set our house in order, worked out the basics of the very indigenous self-reliant system, then we seek foreign aid according to our own set-priorities. In addition, it is not foreign aid but foreign investment on which we put our faith — first and foremost.

Domestic or foreign — what is the name of the game? Like common sense not being so common, the obvious is not often realized: it must be domestic first and domestic last. There cannot be any free lunch. We must earn our prosperity through our own efforts and also resources which might be supplemented by foreign aid but our own contributions should be forthcoming first.

WINDOW ON ASIA

Shahed Latif

It is uniformly the same rusting hardware. But coffers are full for certain individuals, whose offices are located within the Secretariat-Purana Paltan-Motijheel area of Dhaka City.

This is true about project aid; but what about food aid which saves us from hunger and famine? No doubt, food aid bridges the gap between life and death when there is a large-scale crop failure due to natural calamities. But, the

allegedly Government is not happy at all since food aid will be less — so less money for the budget. To put it bluntly, foreign aid has become so pervasive, we have become so used to living of the welfare cheques of the benevolent donors that unless there is a wholesale reorganization of the dependency system, we can never ever think of self-reliant development.

In fact, I will go a step further and venture to suggest

The South and a New Economic Order

by Janet Bruin

The writer denounces the present international economic system as being undemocratic and unjust, managed by international financial institutions whose policies impoverish the majority of the world's people.

State department's list. Volcker is not, so far as I know, personally a murderer, but he represents a system called capitalism in which the US is a dominant force.

Davidson Budhoo, a Grenadan economist formerly employed by the International Monetary Fund, thinks of the IMF and the World Bank as "constituting a new international mafia... using every means of corruption, intimidation and fraud... cooperating with governments that are enslaved by it to repress and murder those who protest its policies and tyranny. Individuals who stand up and speak out against the Fund are persecuted and in many instances made to disappear."

He thus points to the negative impact of these policies on political and civil rights, specifically restrictions on trade union rights and the right to organise and strike. He further noted that "when you look at the impact of the (Bank and Fund) programmes on social welfare it is absolutely traumatic...nothing sort of genocide."

These are hard words to swallow by people who are comfortable, by people who are not victims of these policies, and by people who profit from the poverty of others; but as one travels and comes into contact with the victims of this system, if one's eyes are open, the conclusion is inescapable. At this Committee's Seminar on Development for Global Security last December, a Catholic nun from the Philippines spoke of the genocidal effect of debt and structural adjustment programmes on the people of her country,

where one child dies every hour as a result. Globally, UNICEF estimates that 500,000 children die each year from debt-related problems, yet the policies continue and many more children will be doomed to death unless something is done.

Not a single success of a structural adjustment programme can be cited, yet they continue to be imposed. The "solutions" seem to compound the problems. Debt cancellation and reduction schemes have hardly made a dent. The developing countries' debt is up 73% from 1982: Africa's debt is up by 80%. Asia's debt has nearly doubled, and Latin America's debt is up by 25%.

According to Michel Chossudovsky the macro-economic framework generates poverty through the main economic policy instruments. The "solution" to the debt crisis becomes the "cause", the promotion of exports ultimately leads to lower commodity prices and less export revenue from which to repay the external debt. Structural adjustment transforms national economies into open economic spaces and countries into territories. The latter are "reserves" of cheap labour and natural resources.

A case in point is Sri Lanka, where a World Bank loan set up a garment industry employing women to work at \$5 for a six-day week. When asked about the Bank's support for such exploitative conditions, the head of the Bank's Women and Development Programme said: "Our job is to eliminate poverty. It is not our responsibility if the multinationals

come and offer such low wages." Well, whose responsibility is it?

It should be pointed out that poverty is also on the rise in the North despite record levels of growth for many years. According to the UNDP's Human Development Report of 1991, more than 100 million people in the industrialised countries are currently living below the poverty line. In the United States, for example, almost 36 million people are officially poor (up by more than 10 million in the last two years), among them 28% of the nation's children.

The shift of manufacturing jobs from the North to the Third World and Eastern Europe, by which the corporations take advantage of cheap labour and lax environmental standards to maximise profits, has swelled the ranks of the unemployed and underemployed. This is compounded by the inability of Third World people to purchase First World goods. In the US, this helps to explain the homelessness of up to three million people, an unavoidable sight almost anywhere in the country, and the spread of hunger beyond the inner cities affecting about 30 million people, a growth of 50% since 1985 according to a recent report of the Tufts University Centre on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy.

Aside from the terrible loss of human potential represented by unemployment and poverty statistics, the violation of human rights they represent, and the misery they cause, there are the resulting frustrations and aggressions that lead to rising crime rates, drug abuse, racist incidents, and other severe breaches of the peace. I will leave it to the economists to debate whether the global economic recession will develop into a worldwide depression, and for the political economists to speculate on the extent to which the proliferation of ethnic, civil and regional wars in progress today are caused by economic scarcity and unequal distribution of income. It is enough to say that things will in all probability not improve in the near future and that this will spell mounting misery for the peoples of the world.

So what does this 'new world order' offer in the way of solutions to these problems? As far as can be seen, the economic aspects are not along the lines of the New International Economic Order adopted by the UN in the 1970s, a vision of a world based on equity, sovereign equality, interdependence, common interest and cooperation among all States...correcting inequalities and redressing existing injustices, making it possible to eliminate the widening gap between the developed and the developing countries and ensuring steadily accelerating economic and social development and peace and justice for present and future generations. The present state of affairs has prompted the view among some observers that there is nothing really new about the 'new world order', that it is the same old world order we've had since Columbus set sail for the Americas, when the big companies sought global expansion, cheap sources of labour and raw materials, and higher profits.

Others say that we are in fact living in a new economic age and that it is important to understand how it is organised. James Morgan, writing recently in the Financial Times of London, described what he terms 'the new imperialism' as a global system orchestrated by the Group of 7, the IMF, the World Bank and the General Agreement on Tariffs and

Trade (GATT). He noted that "it works through a system of indirect role that has involved the integration of leaders of developing countries into the network of the new ruling class."

In this system, a developing country can receive large, cheap loans if it adopts the programmes embodied in the orthodoxy of more or less balanced budgets, devaluation, privatisation, and a hearty welcome for foreign investment. The evolution of structural adjustment programmes has involved the total integration of the IMF and World Bank into the life of the target countries.

Once integrated in this way, they insist that the country open itself to foreign investment, along the lines of the example of the garment industry in Sri Lanka. These policies are leaving the developing countries more dependent and exploited than ever.

Martin Khor of the Third World Network notes that the transnational corporations want to take over the feudal and national monopolies so they can control everything. They opposed the Code of Conduct for Transnational Corporations but insist upon trade-related intellectual property rights so they continue to monopolise technology and exclude new entrants from the club... They call for international liberalisation through GATT in order to secure new markets. In other words, state enterprises and government assets of the South are to be turned over to the transnationals.

Privatisation, another mantra of the 'new imperialism', is being forced onto the countries of the South with great vigour. State enterprises are to be sold and the private sector is to get more involved in the provision of services such as healthcare and education.

There is discussion about the imposition of user fees for previously free services such as water and sanitation. This is bound to make life more difficult for people everywhere. The International Herald Tribune recently described a series of 'successfully' privatised enterprises in Argentina, mentioning only at the end of the article that the resulting social cost was thousands of jobs.

Unless and until the international economic system is transformed, there can be no prospects for a significant, long-term reduction in poverty or for true development to take place. Unless we can find a way to go from a system that is undemocratically managed by and for private economic interests to a system that is fair, equitable, and managed by and for the overwhelming majority of the world's people, the possibility of even a minimum subsistence for all will elude us. Unless the vast inequalities in income distribution are corrected, national and international peace and security will be endangered.

Can the system as it is organised today be reformed? Can it be democratised? Or will the solution require 'popular rebellion or outcry in the streets in a massive way, by which the victims stand up for their rights in great numbers, and say No to the IMF and World Bank?'

Can popular participation determine policy at the national and international levels? What will it take to bring this about? What should be the strategy for action that will lead to change? These are the questions that people are asking from La Paz to Lomé to Luzon.

—Third World Network Features
This article by Janet Bruin, of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, is based on her address to a seminar on 'The South and A New World Order' held in Geneva recently.

IT is impossible to speak about democracy without considering its economic aspects. The present international economic system is profoundly undemocratic and unjust. It is characterised by an ever widening gap between rich and poor both within and between nations. It is determined by a tiny handful of heads of state and financial managers who exercise more power over the developing countries than the colonial authorities could ever have dreamt of during the colonial era.

It is managed by international financial institutions that espouse slogans about poverty alleviation while carrying out policies that are guaranteed to impoverish millions more people in the North as well as the South. It is eroding national sovereignty and the right to self-determination in the Third World as well as in eastern Europe, which is presently undergoing a process of 'Third-Worldisation' behind the facade of democracy.

It is not necessary to go into great detail on the debt crisis and structural adjustment. They have been adequately described in many fora, including at the Special NGO Committee on Development's conference 'People and the Debt Crisis — Challenge for NGOs' and recorded in its final report. It is enough to say that the truly legitimate debt hardly exists or does not exist at all, that the vast majority of the loans that have resulted in the \$1.5 trillion external debt of the developing countries were contracted fraudulently and spent wastefully, and that Third World governments accept the medicine of structural adjustment because they stand little chance of receiving additional external finance for development or being accorded credit worthy status otherwise.

While top business executives and those associated in some way with foreign capital have been enriched by this process, the working classes and growing segments of the middle class in the countries of the South are being pauperized. In the present interna-

tional economic disorder, there is no prospect for improvement. For the coming decade at least, according to the most recent UN World Economic Survey, economic stagnation or decline is predicted.

The debt crisis and the structural adjustment programmes imposed on more than 80 developing countries have had a negative impact on the realisation of economic, social, and cultural rights, especially the right to work, food, housing, health, education and development. They have resulted in mounting unemployment, lower wages, cuts in health, education and social services, and a decrease in the level of schooling as children are forced to work to help support the family, a slowdown or cessation of the decline in infant mortality in some countries, a new spate of epidemics, environmental devastation, and palpable deterioration in the quality of life for hundreds of millions of people around the world.

At the same time, the South is transferring resources to the North at a rapid pace. Between 1982 and 1990, \$432 billion flowed northwards, the equivalent of more than six Marshall Plans, depriving the poorest people in the world of the basic human necessities. Such a global economic system is neither democratic nor moral, and it cannot be permitted to continue.

Commenting on the morality of the international economic system, the journalist Alexander Cockburn, in a 1984 issue of The Nation (US), wrote: 'Every time Paul Volcker puts the US prime interest rate up one point, \$4.5 billion is added overnight to Third World debt service. Volcker might just as well take several thousand undernourished African babies into a field and machine-gun them. As chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, Volcker has been responsible for more deaths than the combined total of every "terrorist" group on the US

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.

Lucky 13

Sir, "Something is better than nothing" might have been the driving importance about accepting South Korea's donation of 13 cars to Bangladesh for the purpose of the 7th SAARC summit.

This extraordinary conveyance of the Korean transports sped up the mobility of the summitters while moving comfortably toward friendlier relations between these East Asian NIC and South Asian LDC.

For the sake of civilized manner above all complexities, a state of late 20th century accepts any gift of goodwill — an international etiquette — and oftentimes with reciprocal deed.

Bangladeshis must have been happy with the timely present — a diplomatic generosity — that added lustre to the grand meeting of the leaders of South Asian nations. But to tune up the multinational juxtaposition in intra-regional affairs could the host have somehow had a few cars she needed badly for her regional conference.

However, in addition to

convenience to summit functions, the lucky 13 automobiles have enriched the vehicle fleet of the state which will help the administration in the efforts for accelerated development of this LDC.

M Rahman
Zila School Road, Mymensingh

Writing

Sir, M Zahidul Haque, Editor, Association of the British Council Scholars writes: "It seems that we are gradually losing interest in the art of writing features, poems, stories etc. I had to reach to such a conclusion having been found a very poor response..." And to support his 'conclusion' he says: "Of course, there may be quite a number of members who would say that they missed the newsletter or invitation for articles (letter dt. 4-12-92)."

I am sorry to say that M Z Haque's inversion happens to be most deplorable. Why should 'quite a number of members' say that they missed the newsletter or invitation for articles? It may very well be true that in reality they did

miss the information; would do the same even after the appearance of the above mentioned letter. Not all members read the 'To The Editor' column. Besides, M Z Haque could have said: 'There may be quite a number of members who may have missed...'

However, his view (conclusion) about 'gradually losing interest in the art of writing' by the 'enlightened ones' is quite biased. What guarantee can M Z Haque give about a writer's piece of work being accepted and its appearance in print?

As one who is interested in 'writing' I draw the kind attention of M Z Haque to the following: a) He has not mentioned what type of features, poems, stories etc he eagerly seeks from the writers and in what language. b) Whether or not there's going to be any remuneration for the writers. c) He has not mentioned the address where the writers are to send their work. d) There's no mention about the time limit. e) If he is seeking unpublished write-ups then this has not been mentioned.

Last but not the least, his advice about the 'enlightened ones who should continue to enlighten others' is being carried out in abundance. Otherwise, I am certain, almost all the pages of every newspaper (Bangla and English), magazine, etc, etc, would have remained blank!

Nahata Kamal
Dhaka

Truth

Sir, It is not fair to injure one's feelings or to degrade one's good-will for inappropriate reasons. When one speaks of a truth, it would obviously hurt those against whom it has been spoken but definitely benefit the majority people who deserve to learn the truth. By seizing one's right of expression none will be able to keep facts hidden from the public. Truth will itself find its way to get circulated among the people and establish its own course of action.

M Zahidul Haque
Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka

Communal harmony

Sir, Recently the communal harmony of the sub-continent was terribly affected. The fundamentalists are to be blamed for all this.

Before being of any religion or caste we are human beings. We all are made of flesh and blood and bones, nothing besides, nothing different. Some of us are poor and some are rich, some are Hindus, some of us are Muslims. But first of all we are humans.

Those who are trying to create difference between and disharmony among us are not human beings. And we all have to be united against them.

Amir
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