Dhaka, Friday, January 22, 1993

## The Man from Hope

There is a danger in the way in which Bill Clinton has come to assume the office of the President of the United States. He has raised far too much expectation in us all - both Americans, and those of us from the developing world. It will call for the sharpest of skills, the most creative of plans, boundless resourcefulness and an indefatigable drive to live up them. In spite of the enormity of the various challenges, the magic of Bill Clinton is that, we expect him to live upto all of them. Repetition of thirty five words of the oath of office, the very same that George Washington swore to 204 years ago (in 1789). completed the process of Clinton's assumption of the U.S. Presidency. What started as a challenge to win the votes of the American people, with the uttering of those crutial words has turned to the challenge of living upto his promises to the people who chose him to lead them. Time for rhetorics is over. Time to show what he can deliver has arrived.

The inaugural speech, which we in Bangladesh were able to see live for the first time - courtesy BTV and CNN — did not match the elegance of Kennedy or the eloquence of a Lincoln. But it surpassed all with the zest of youth, the courage of a dreamer and the sincerity of a man committed to change. The speech, which has been written by many, further improved by many more; one in which every word and every emphasis have been weighed over and over; would not have made the impact that it did, but for the man delivering it. The 42nd president of the US called for America's renewal, and we knew that he meant it. We in Bangladesh hope that he succeeds. For we know that a healthy US economy would be a boost for world trade, which in its turn could help an economy like ours. As was expected, the inaugural speech was

mostly addressed to the American people with occasional, and over-generalised references to the world outside. However we would expect one item to receive a higher priority in the Clinton agenda, than it did in Mr. Bush's. That is the North-South dialogue. With the Uruguay Round of talks still making no headway, and serious questions being raised about the utility of GATT, President Clinton will have to give more serious consideration to improving the trade relations with the developing countries of the South. If the words that "there is no clear division to-

day between what is foreign and what is domestic - world economy, the world environment, the AIDS, the world arms race affect us all", came from President Clinton's heart-and we believe that it did-then he will of course realise that economic development of a country like ours depends on the treatment meted out to us by the stronger economies. For far too long we have depended on doles. But now perhaps we should receive investment, a chance to participate in joint ventures, and receive a genuine transfer of technology — remember all our economies are woven into one — so that we can participate in the marketplace that the world is today.

America's leadership in the world, which President Clinton correctly claims the US did so much make, will be truly meaningful if the new President takes a fresh look into the whole question of US relations with the developing world. Here also, as in the case of the US, a renewal is sorely awaited. Fresh thinking needs to replace the ones that have outlived its time. A new partnership, rather than more of the dependency relationship, is what we expect from this man from hope.

# Saving the Rural Riches

All of Bangladesh's cultural riches, including literature and music, born in the cities, are of rural origin. Most of them are directly so. And a few of the rest are once or at the most thrice removed from that. Zainul, our great painting mentor, came from the village and in his lifelong stay in cities, indeed lived in the selfsame villages in his mind, in his outlook. And he dreamed of artists of the nation — all kinds of artists—to live in the villages and in close community. And he dreamed of a village that would be the essence of all the villages of Bengal. The folk museum at Sonargaon and the residence there of some painters together with the annual event of a folk art and craft festival are all celebrations of Zainul Abedin's cherished dreams. It is sad to see that on the occasion of the opening at Sonargaon of 'National Folk Culture and Pous Mela' — well that is reportedly the name of the event — on Wednesday by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Zainul's name has hardly even been remembered. Slips of this size and nature do not promise a great future either of the Bangladesh Folk and Craft Art Foundation' or of the folk festival.

Slips—lesser only when compared to the above but otherwise gross-were certain to follow. When was Sonargaon the capital of Bengal? It was a capital of surrounding countryside never amounting to the whole of what we call Bengal over different patches of times and the monuments that are now being preserved there are not of the Isa Khan regime or subsequent Mughal suzerainty, not to speak of earlier Pathan sultanate. Sonargaon was picked up by Zainul to house his desideratum - the folk museum and the artists village for reasons miles afar from historical importance. The Sonargaon buildings familiar to tourists and those that house the museum were created by post-Cornwalliss zemindars.

A definition of culture given at the inauguration of the festival that "culture means to live a better life," is a very inept adage that can at best be confusing. Who doesn't know that those that are living 'better' lives in Bangladesh — in the eyes of all classes of people — are people mostly bereft of culture and those refinements that are born of belonging to culture — a culture any culture. And conversely, as culture is what holds the poor hapless masses in the villages together steadfastly to life and work and hope, we so avidly want to celebrate our village riches through holding festivals. As for Bangladesh, culture is there in poverty and struggle and in villages and mofassil towns. In the megalopolises, we seem to have overgrown culture in spite of our 'better life' of more education, more arts and more sciences and most of all of more ease and privilege.

To the folk museum at Sonargaon and the various government agencies having to do with village crafts — as also the art connoisseurs and businessmen dealing in artistic wealth of the villages our fervent appeal would be to please save those from the consumeristic onslaught of the day that compels art to be watered down to vulgar mass scale caricatures — whether these relate to visual or plastic or performing arts.

HE so-called Uruguay Round - the stath round of the GATT match could well use an analysis from a Third World perspective.

The deadlock between the European Community (EC) and the United States over agricultural subsidies is on its way to becoming large scale conflict between the two economic su perpowers.

The most egocentric of the EC's arguments for subsidies is that 13 million Europeans make a living from agriculture whereas only five million Americans do. What this argu ment fails to consider are the hundreds of millions of people in the Third World who also make their living from agricul-

The argument might lead one to assume that only the United States and France, respectively the largest and sec ond largest producers of food are affected by the issue of agricultural subsidies.

This is far from the truth. These subsidies profoundly af fect the countries of the South whose products are competitive with those of the EC, as well as the tropical and subtropical countries which produce oilseed that is competi tive in the international mar kets with European oilseed.

URING the years Unit-

Japan and shaped its

economic destiny, Japan was

at the mercy of decisions made

for it by US which could use

two leverages over Japan. First,

the threat of removing the

security blanket. Second,

restricting the hugely rich US

markets from the Japanese

imports. Because of Japan's

pitiful state of the economy,

US could make Japan to yield

to its commands even if that

meant foregoing Japan's own

interests. Japan was a mere

Things are different today.

Tokyo's decision-making is

largely a function of what

Japan needs, not what US

wants. Japan is now less will-

ing to follow US lead and no

longer convinced that its eco-

nomic well-being and territo-

rial security depends entirely

on Washington. The Bank of

Japan, for instance, recently

refused to go along with the

US Federal Reserve to lower

federal funds rate despite

President Bush's expectation

that Japan would cooperate.

Admittedly, both globalization

of US economy and made-in-

HE contradictions are gl-

enough food to feed itself. Yet

millions are dying of starvation

and hundreds of millions face

real.

malnutrition

healthy life.

Nutrition held here.

aring, the pangs of hung-

The world has more than

By 1900-1990, there was

enough food in the world - if

distributed according to indi-

vidual requirements — to pro-

vide well over that would be

needed to meet energy needs.

Instead, in the same period,

one in every five people in de-

veloping countries regularly

failed to have access to

decision-taker by all accounts.

ed States occupied

A GATT-ed World Food Market The heart of the issue as formulated by the US and the EC is the reduction of oilseed production in Europe: sowing would be limited to 5,128 million hectares, and production reduced from 11.5 to 10 or 11 million tonnes. The agreement reached could not be more

symbolic. In return, according to authorised calculations, international trade of agricultural products will increase by around US\$200 billion with the reduction of subsidies. Of this total, perhaps 15 per cent

will benefit the Third World.

kind and equitable to the

Europeans. The EC will have

six years to reduce its exports

nity's sacrifices are virtually

by 21 per cent: the Commu-

But the subsidies are not the real problem as they are the reflection of a far more serious situation. Agricultural technology has significantly increased productivity, whether in the development of blight and weather resistant hybrids or the use of chemical fertilizers. Malthus's fear of seeing humans lose the race between a skyrocketing population and limited agricultural production is far from coming true.

Former Colombian president Alfonso Lopez Michelsen writes that the focus on the US-EC deadlock at the Uruguay round of economic talks is misleading and obscures the more serious problem: the economic distortion called agricultural surplus. IPS reports from Bogota.

With the exception of a few isolated cases, the greatest economic problem of the food producing nations is how to place surplus products without bringing down international market prices. Humanitarian problems count for little or

nothing. For more than 20 years, the world witnessed the so-called "economic miracles" - whether the German, the Japanese or the South-cast Asian

But unlike those of the past, these miracles are not based on agricultural production. Neither Japan nor Germany nor the countries of South-east Asia are food exporters that have to subsidize their own agriculture to survive. They guarantee food security with unyielding protectionism and price support to annul the comparative advantage of countries that do not subsidise agriculture.

So it is with Japan and rice. Subsidies for domestic rice production reached US\$31 billion in 1991. Meanwhile. Japan imported other "subsidised" food products from countries that dumped their agricultural surplus on the market below the production cost: beet sugar from the EC rather than cane sugar; wheat, barley, and other US and European grain rather than products for the southern hemisphere.

It was previously thought these countries owed their surprising development their "miracles" - to the reduction in military spending

that followed disarmament and military spending limits im posed by the victors after World War II.

While this certainly was a factor, these countries have had comparatively low fiscal spending on agriculture. While the US spent US\$34.7 billion and the EC spent US\$83.6 billion on subsidies in 1991. other "miracle" countries were benefitting from exports sold at below the production cost.

A recent example in Latin America of the cost of subsidising agricultural exports is the case of coffee. For years, there was a quota arrangement between coffee producers and consumers, which kept the price of coffee at a profitable level in world markets. At the same time, much of the coffee surplus was traded with socialist countries for certain industrial materials.

The fall of communism destroyed this arrangement, and South American coffee producers had to begin to subsidise their farmers, whether by devaluing their currency or compensating for the differences in price. In the case of Colombia, the reserves of the

national coffee fund, built up over many years, were exhausted. The result was a fiscal outlay of US\$500 million.

While no one would allow such an expenditure for armaments in a single year, it seemed logical and necessary to the Columbian government to spend that much to protect the livelthood of 350,000 coffee-growing peasant families.

The problem is thus not just the face-off between France and the United States over agricultural subsidies but a global problem caused by a form of economic distortion wrongly called agricultural

How are we to understand why people are starving to death in Somalia when in the United States farmers are paid not to grow food? How are we to make sense of the need in tropical regions to withhold or destroy coffee which other countries would willingly buy at a reasonable price?

If the GATT talks are to produce meaningful change, the new world economic order must learn to see the food market as more than a simple economic equation.

Alfonso Lopez Michelsen is presently the leader of Colombia's Liberal Party.

# The Japan that Can Say No to US

by Abu K Selimuddin

Tokyo's decision-making is largely a function of what Japan needs, not what US wants. Japan is now less willing to follow US lead and no longer convinced that its economic well-being and territorial security depends entirely on Washington.

US weaknesses have handcuffed US ability to conduct its domestic and foreign policies quite independently. Previously autonomous decisions are increasingly becoming hostage to international developments.

Today's assertive Japan is saying no to US which holds a limited leverage to dictate to Japan. There are four key reasons why Japan depends less on US today.

First: Japan's share of trade with US, for instance, accounted for 35 per cent of Japan's global trade in 1986. Today, this figure is down to 27 per cent. Last year, Asia has replaced the slumping US economy as the largest Japanese export market. In contrast, US dependence on Japan's capital and technology

has grown over the years. The Pentagon, for instance, de pends on Japan for semicon ductors and high tech equipment for smart weapons which helped US tremendously to win a quick victory in the Gulf war. What's more, American leading computer companies like IBM, Apple, Compaq and Tandy also depend on the Japanese manufacturing com-

panies for supplies. Second: In the 1980's, almost \$600 billion Japanese money was invested abroad, especially in United States. Today, Japanese investors are turning inward because US market is no longer attractive to invest. Last year, Japanese investors took more money out of US than they put into US; they withdrew almost \$20

billion form US, plus the Japanese investors are now net sellers of US securities and bonds. Further, Japan's economy has been growing twice as fast as US's and has very prospect for relatively strong expansion in the 1990's.

Third: The break up of the former Soviet Union is making Japan less reliant on US security umbrella. Why? Because the long held threat of possible Soviet invasion of Japan — a threat that US could easily use against Japan to keep its 12 military bases — is largely eliminated. Japan is now building the economic power base in the Pacific Rim region. In the last few years, for instance, Japan invested \$12 billion in three of the most rapidly developing Asian countries - Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia - which among them have a population of 250 million. By comparison, US companies invested only \$3 billion during the same period. Japan is handing out the largest amount of foreign aid in this region. Of \$10 billion in foreign aid, for example, it has handed out \$6.5 billion to the newly industrialized countries (NICs) of the Pacific Rim. Japan's financial power has drawn its long time enemy China closer. Japan has loaned China billions and is helping China build human capital by training a great number of Chinese. Clearly, a cash-rich Japan and a lobour-rich China will draw enormous economic strengths from each other by building an economic bridge

Fourth: Japan is the world's largest money lender to US. Its cross-country investment includes direct investment of more than \$50 billion and portfolio investment of \$175 billion that supports over 500,000 US jobs. This figure will shoot up to one million by 1995. More Japanese assets in US means more Japanese influence in America's financial destiny. That means shrinking economic clout of US in the world's economic and political

Japan's lessened dependence on US is also demonstrated by the fact that its economy has remained robust despite severe recession in US. It's now no longer the question of how much Japan depends on US. The question is how much US depends on Japan for its economic growth. If US is not quick to put its economic house in order by carefully addressing its structural problems, it will no longer remain the master of its own economic destiny. Why? Because Japan will translate its economic clout into influencing US economic future - a very uncomfortable situation US would not like to be in.

# Ample Harvest Fails to Feed Hungry Planet

Depthnews reports from Rome

world, malnutrition in its various forms persists in virtually

all countries, the report says. Poverty, not lack of field, is the root cause of hunger and malnutrition which remain "the most devastating problems facing the majority of the world's poor," says the report produced jointly by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organisation

enough food to meet their dietary energy needs of a active The report was issued for the nutrition conference, the "Hunger and malnutrition most important gathering of remain the most devastating its kind for 50 years. The conproblems facing the majority of ference approved a World the world's poor," according to Declaration and a Plan of Action aimed at improving nuthe main background document released for the trition and eradicating hunger International Conference on and malnutrition.

In a joint statement, Edouard Saouma, FAO "In spite of general improvements in food supplies, Director-General, and Dr health conditions and in the Hisroshi Nakajima, WHO availability of educational and Director-General, said: "For social services throughout the the first time in history, gov-

Poverty, not lack of food, is the root cause of hunger and malnutrition

ernments acting in an international forum will be asked to think beyond the still-present problems of hunger and survival and to focus squarely on nutrition and health."

The key issues are: · Over 780 million people - 20 per cent of the population of the developing world + are chronically undernour-

 About 190 million chil dren under five years of age, including more than 150 million in Asia and 27 million in Africa, suffer from protein-energy malnutrition.

 Every day, 40,000 children under five years of age die, and malnutrition is a major contributing factor.

people suffer from micronutrient deficiencies which can lead to blindness, mental retardation and even death. Food-borne and water-

More than 2,000 million

borne diseases affect millions of people in both developed and developing countries. Noncommunicable diseases related to diet and lifestyle, including some cancers and heart conditions that have long been common in developed countries, are increasing in countries where they rarely used to occur.

The findings of the FAO-WHO report include striking examples of the nutritional disparities between and within countries:

 In about 50 of the poorest countries, undernutrition is widespread

\* By the end of the 1980s, about 60 per cent of the global

which had more than 2,600 kilocalories available per person per day. But at the same time, there were 11 countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, with a population of 123 million, where dictary energy supplies were "Grossly insuffi cient" at less than 2,000 kilo-

population lived in countries

calories per person per day.

. This situation is even worse today, where countries in Southern Africa are facing critical acute food shortages and starvation. In about 40 high-income

countries, diet-related disorders such as obesity, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension and adult-onset diabetes are major problems. But mortality from some of these diseases is dropping in most of these countries as a result of improved nutrition education, changes in dietary and lifestyle habits, and better health

 Even in high-income countries with adequate food, some households suffer from similar forms of undernutrition as are found in lower-income nations. Still, there are grounds for

 Data from the United Nations Population Division show a general improvement with regard to infant and young mortality. In sub-Saharan Africa the infant mortality rate fell from 165 to 121 per 1,000 live births between 1960 and 1983. In South Asia the fall was from 157 to 115 infant deaths per 1,000 live births. In other regions the rates are well under 100.

 Mortality from cardiovascular diseases and the prevalence of other dietrelated noncommunicable diseases such as obesity, diabetes mellitus (non-insulin-dependent), certain types of cancer and dental caries, has been declining in many European countries and in North America. Japan and Australia in the last 15 years. This decline is attributed largely to the initiation of health education campaigns to reduce dietary risk factors, such as excess intake of saturated fat and cholesterol; and life-style risk factors, such as smoking and lack of physical exercise; and improved health care.

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.

No more such atrocity Sir, As a result of the grim

incident in Chittagong four naval officers and 15-sea-men have been dismissed. Thirteen more navy personnel are undergoing a Court Martial for their involvement in the arson and looting at Bandertilla and Halishahar.

The steps taken by the authorities of the Bangladesh Navy are timely no doubt and we see that good sense still prevails in our armed forces. I think it will help pacify the tense situation in Chittagong.

It would be wrong to blame the entire naval force for the felony committed by a section of its unit. But what is alarming is the open revolt by a section of ratings. Endurance and loyalty to authority are the main lessons in the armed forces. But we hardly find any such qualities in these marauding ratings. However, the Bangladesh Navy has shown its prudence by taking necessary measures against them. Otherwise, they will lose the trust of people as the protector of our lives and property as well as independence and sovereignty.

We hope that this sort of shameful acts that impair the image of our armed forces will never take place on our soil.

The timely steps taken by the Bangladesh Navy are certainly appreciable in this regard. It is expected that the armed forces will always be with us in the time of crisis, as they did before, and help uphold the values of democracy in the process.

Rushayed Ehsan Supal,

### **Pull towards** barbarism

Sir, Thank you for your editorial comment on the barbaric stoning of a woman in Maulvibazar. The Imam's 'fatwa' is another example of inhuman exploitation of religion. But what I find profoundly

disturbing is that a village court, traditionally composed of elders, believed to be mature in years and wisdom, should let itself turn into an infernal instrument of a sexually frustrated man's murderous sadism, and that nobody in that benighted village should turn up to protest against an action that patently flew against the basic norms of civilization. And, where, indeed, were the law enforcers at that

What exactly is happening in this country? Is the stoning

of Nurjahan a wild isolated incident? Or are we letting the dark forces in our society pull us all into barbarism?

Osman Jamal Shiddheswari, Dhaka

### The Declaration of Independence

Sir, Fine, we believe that the late President Ziaur Rahman had said: "Aami Major Zia bolehhi......" over the microphone of a radio station installed at Chittagong in the year 1971. We believe he also made this declaration of the Liberation War on behalf of the leader late Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Late Zia must have had received 'orders' to do what he did on that fateful night. If not then the whole announcement is or was done in a very bad taste. No soldier must act on his own when he has his 'superior' and in no way he must take actions on his own unless of course he has his own reasons. In this case someone must come up with a proper explanation with proofs. The royal journalists who appear to be faithful to the nation ought to take this issue seriously and save the nation from a total ruination.

When Zia ended his declaration did he say "Bangladesh Zindabad" or "Joy Bangla" must be clarified by them who make a strong show of the War of Liberation fought at the cost of millions of people of this coun-

Nahtasha Kamal, Dhaka

## OPINION dangerous fascination...' Mahfuz Anam has done a

wonderful job. His timely commentary "A dangerous fascination for controversies" on January 12, 1993 has, in fact, echoed the feelings of the whole nation, nay, the people of the country, who can ill afford to see the history of the War of Liberation so blatantly twisted by so-called politicians and their side kicks. These are the known bunch of marauders of history who are used to thrive like mushrooms in the body-politics of any nation. No word of condemnation would be adequate to address them who are twist-prone, megalomaniac and absolutely crude in

their mental faculties. There is a universally acknowledged precept that fools are the natural offshoots of garrulity. Their clandestine effort is always at making a shy at incredible things fringing on blasphemy and ludicrity. Barrister Huda has been trying to be too fast and, sooner or later, he is sure to tumble himself over the hard rock of truth and sanity. Creating controversy, it appears, has been his most favourite pastime.

We agree with you entirely when you say that by idolising Ziaur Rahman at the cost of the great image of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibar Rahman, Barrister Huda is continuously defiling the herote contour of General Zia. Because, they have had their

respective places duly carved, evening of March 27, 1971 in the hearts of the people by their own richness - not in any way complementing one

another. When Minister Huda discovers that Shetkh Mujtb concluded his historic 7th March speech with "Joy Pakistan" he could not perhaps extricate himself from the sinister stigma of his own dubious past when he used to bask himself directly or indirectly in the liberal patronage of General Ershad.

It is indeed a pity that Barrister Huda, by being over smart, is not only ridiculing himself but also unknowingly splashing black hues on his leader. Inevitably the later has had to face embarrassing situation within the Cabinet for some of Huda's unwitty remarks in the Parliament or in public meetings.

The ever active minister, it could be imagined, himself would not relish contradictory statements by some of his freedom fighter Cabinet colleagues on the date of "Zia's declaration" of Liberation War. Barrister Huda itched out 27th March, 1971 and overwrote March 26, 1971, which, not to speak of the opposition par ties, his own men in BNP would not endorse. Nor would the Radio technocrats who helped Zia to read out a statement . behalf of our President " retkh Mujib" in the

Yet Iluda says it was 26th March, and "surely he is an honourable man".

It will be no wonder if bad people" try to dig out something else from Huda's exuber ance and over enthusiasm in castigating the opposition or casting aspersion on the great leader Sheikh Mujib. Words somehow slipped out that the agile Information Minister was almost being ripped off his position for his inept handling of truth and for making a public caricature of the history of the War of Liberation at large. So, he had to change his strategies to play down overtly with the emotional attachment of the Prime Minister to her late husband. This incidentally reminds us of that journalistpolitician who declared himself to remain ever ready on his toes to sweep the streets of Dhaka if his great leader Ershad had desired so. It is known to every one now how that "selfless would be sweeper" ended up in losing

God bless Barrister Huda. And to you Executive Editor Mahfuz Anam our heartiest congratulations for such an excellent exposure. Thanks to The Daily Star.

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