

Hope for Pakistan

The postponement of the opposition's protest march in Islamabad planned for Friday, an army-brokered deal between President Ghulam Ishaq Khan and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to retire at least temporarily and the dissolution of the National Assembly to pave the way for a fresh election, probably in October, are all part of what is seen as the easing of tension in Pakistan. However, most of these developments remain based on rumours and inspired speculations. Unless the parties concerned — Ishaq Khan, Sharif, Benazir Bhutto and the army chief General Abdul Waheed, now the principal actor in the drama — sign a deal or speak up on the action plan, nothing can be considered settled. The fact that people of Pakistan have seen enough of horse trading, what even by Islamabad standard has been the most bizarre politics, for past four months, has so far made no difference to politicians, excluding virtually none. Each one has played his (or her) part with relentless cynicism, knowing full well that each move gave the army a new excuse — some would say, a perfectly valid reason — to step in and impose martial law on the country. There may be all kinds of reasons why General Abdul Waheed did not grab power all this time. He probably prefers to be the king-maker than to take the direct responsibility of running the administration of a strife-torn country. Or he may well be giving the feuding politicians one last chance to restore to the country a measure of peace and stability within a constitutional framework.

Yet, there is so little ground for optimism, only a dwindling faith within Pakistan that these politicians would meet even the minimum expectations. There is really nothing new about politics in the country being personality-oriented, instead of being based on a socio-economic agenda. However, it has never been as unprincipled as it has been in recent months. In this scenario, even Bhutto, a politician supposedly committed to some acceptable norms and groundrules, no longer offers much of a choice.

At this moment, options remain hopelessly limited for Pakistan. One hope is that the deal as reported yesterday will go through and the country will have a fresh election to the National Assembly in October, under the supervision of an interim government headed by much-respected General Yakub Khan or someone of his stature, with the army chief Waheed playing the watchdog role. Ishaq Khan, the aging civil servant who has played his role with ruthless cynical tenacity, may well retire. However, it is too much to expect that an young ambitious politician like Sharif will bow out. Bhutto has her problems too, even within her own party and outside.

It may well be good for Pakistan if the proposed changes, including the October polls, produce some new leaders with less obsession for power and stronger commitment to stability and peace.

While a national election may well do some good to the country, Pakistan must indeed take a good look at its constitution. It was the move by Sharif to amend the existing one, to deprive the president of certain powers which make a mockery of the parliamentary system, that had touched off the present chain of events. The country must decide, once for all, what kind of system it should be governed under. It cannot be a half-way house, between a parliamentary framework and a presidential rule. At the same time, the relationship between the provinces and the centre must be better defined than they are today. Again, somewhere along the line, the judiciary which won much respect by restoring Sharif to power, thus overturning the presidential decree, should be on the scene, perhaps in the setting up of an election commission, to take a lesson from Bangladesh. It will be a long haul. Pakistan deserves a good chance to come out of the current ordeal, not Pakistan of politicians but Pakistan of impoverished millions who, like people in other countries of the region, look for a place in the sun.

Ogata's Sigh of Relief

Just a day after giving vent to her exasperation over the commitments of aid for relief operation in Bosnia, Sadako Ogata appears to be greatly relieved of her worries, if not entirely happy. Indeed, the chief of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has got the assurance of at least 63 million dollar for her agency alone out of a total amount of 1.13 billion dollar for UN operation in the former republic of Yugoslavia from different governments and international organisations. Now she knows that her agency will have enough at its disposal for continuing the humanitarian, albeit risky, relief operation in besieged Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The response of the donors to her plea has come at a crucial moment when Ogata knew her agency had only enough for keeping alive the residents of the world's most hostile place only for three weeks. Her persuasive leadership has been amply rewarded by the donors. But she could be happier still had the response been equal to her call for a total aid worth 200 million dollar. Certainly, the amount already committed will grow bigger with further contributions by more nations and international aid organisations. But given the enormous need of the trapped people there for the come winter, all such pledges will fall short of being equal to the task.

In this connection, the recent OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference) resolution to send 18,000 troops, but no relief goods, needs to be scrutinised. Sure enough, not all the OIC member countries are in a position to help the Bosnian Muslims on the defensive with enough money, but several of the 51-nation body — particularly the Gulf nations — can financially contribute to Ogata's relief fund. The military aid will be complemented by financial support if countries in Middle East are serious about lessening the sufferings of their Muslim brothers and sisters in Bosnia.

The UNHCR has been braving overwhelming odds not just because of the shortage of relief materials but also because of the danger aid workers are exposed to. Military support until now has remained far from adequate. It is the West that must clearly spell out how it intends to bring an end to the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Its double standard and lack of seriousness has abominably been exposed. The morsels of relief cannot be an answer to the suffering of Bosnian Muslims. A political solution ably supported by military might should be the criterion now.

Migration across International Borders : Need for a Global Policy

SINCE the first day when Homo Sapiens stood up and walked on two feet, he has been on the move. He has crossed vast distances — across deserts, mighty rivers, mountains and even the oceans. Indeed the history of human race is one of ceaseless movement from place to place usually in search of food and security. At a later stage they sought fertile land, plentiful water, temperate climate as well as peace and security. In certain periods of history the movement was rapid while at other times it was slow and unremarkable. But at no time in history the migration stopped.

Historians tell us about the great migration of the Aryans from central Asia to the sub-continent. Others followed from different countries and made it a melting pot of races, cultures, religions and languages. Tagore in his celebrated poem 'Ibharat Tritha' described this process of assimilation. In Bangladesh we have had successive waves of immigrants. The Aryans, Pathans, Mughals, Iranians, Arabs and perhaps people of Mongoloid stock from the East entered this fertile delta and made us what we are today. However since the last few decades a reverse flow has started. People have started to leave this over-populated land in search of better opportunities. While we welcomed the immigrants in the past with open arms, our people, regrettably, are facing obstacles everywhere.

The latest State of the World Population Report, issued by the United Nations Population Fund, has highlighted the phenomenon of migration across international borders. The report estimates that there are at least 100 million international migrants living outside the countries where they were born, or around 2 per cent of the

world's population. Of these, an estimated 17 million are refugees, while at least 20 million are fleeing violence, drought or environmental destruction. The rest, according to the UN report, are economic migrants, seeking opportunities for a better life.

The western countries are concerned about the so-called economic migrants. Such people, they feel, somehow do not deserve their support or assistance. Obviously, they are worried that a flood of such people would disturb their comfortable life style. It may be recalled that the European nations solved their problem of over population and poverty by sending their surplus population to the Americas, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere. Usually the poorest sections of their societies gambled to leave their ancestral homes in search of fortune in distant lands. They did not care to consider the legality of their entry into a country. For them might was right. They did not apply to the immigration authorities in a nice and polite way. They used the most brutal and violent methods that they knew. The American Indians were nearly wiped out by the immigrants of European origin; Australian aborigines are almost extinct. What was the motivation of these migrants? They were clearly economic migrants — just like the Asians and Africans today — who are simply seeking to avail of opportunities they see in Europe and America. They usually try to go legally and often take great pains to meet the stringent requirements for entry. But will they be deterred by the barriers

that have been erected by these affluent countries? The English, the Spanish, the Portuguese, the French and the Dutch were not deterred by either the natural obstacles of those days or the dangers presented by the indigenous people. Necessity, they reasoned, knows no law. These are however different times. The Asian or African migrants seeking a better life in Europe or America or Australia are in no position to use the kind of strong arm tactics that the Europeans used. It is therefore an uphill task, if the affluent countries decide to shut

international trade and greater than the \$46 billion spent worldwide that year in foreign aid. For some countries in the Third World the remittances of the migrant labour has become a major source of foreign exchange. Development programmes of these countries are dependent on the remittances from the expatriates. Indeed the expatriate Chinese are the most important source of foreign investment for China who have fuelled the current boom. Non-resident Indians have also started to play a significant role in speeding up the growth of the

into urban zones, especially the Third World's burgeoning 'megacities'. On a hopeful note the report concludes that continuing migration, both to the cities and internationally is inevitable. The aim must be to bring some balance to the forces driving migration so as to maximize its benefits and minimize its risks. The report recommends policies 'to enable people to live in dignity in their own countries, and to make migration a real choice between opportunities.'

Mr James N. Purcell, the Director General of the International Organization for Migration has, in an article in the International Herald Tribune, called for a coherent strategy which, according to him, is "clearly a global issue". Referring to the restrictive immigration laws being enacted by France and Germany and other developed countries, he said that "the flow of migrants cannot be turned off and on at will." He called on the developed countries to focus on the reasons pushing the huge number of people to seek asylum abroad. He has suggested a number of concrete and positive steps to bring some order in the current chaotic situation. One of his suggestions touched on the root of the problem. According to Mr Purcell the blueprint for action must ensure that international development aid will target migrant-producing countries. The goal is to increase job and wealth creation, fostering development. Is this too idealistic a goal? Bangladesh is literally bursting at the seams. More than eighty per cent of the people live below

the poverty line.

Thanks to the television and stories told by returning migrants, awareness among the poor people about what life abroad can offer to them create an irresistible urge to migrate. They are ready to take incredible risks just to land somewhere in Europe or America. Despite draconian anti-immigration laws it is doubtful if the door can be completely shut on their face. After all these immigrants from the low-income countries offer their services at ridiculously low wage. They are also prepared to do the 'dirty' or physically hazardous jobs which the established and affluent citizens are unwilling to undertake. So the flow will continue but perhaps at a reduced rate though the pressure, both demographic and economic, will intensify. It is not enough, in my view, to simply publish reports and hope for the best. Following the initiative of Mr Purcell the whole question ought to be put on the UN agenda. Whether it is fixed term labour contract in a foreign country or attempted immigration to a rich country for political or economic reasons, a person does not forfeit his fundamental human rights.

The brutal manner in which the Hongkong authorities dealt with the Vietnamese refugees on their soil should alert us about the need for vigilance. The international community should devise a humane and responsible procedure to deal with the desire of a man or woman to find opportunities for a better and more secure life. Should we not be the ones to take the initiative? It is the Third World countries who should collectively put it on the agenda of the General Assembly so that steps can be taken to give the protection of law to the vast number of people crossing national borders in search of better life.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

their doors there is little that the poor countries can do about it. This is the current reality about the report says that "where legal channels are closed, migrants will enter by whatever means are available to them." The increasingly stringent and harsh measures being introduced by these countries do not seem to substantiate this remark.

Migrant workers who go to a country on the basis of a contract for a limited period has become a new but rather important feature of the contemporary world scene. According to the UN Population Fund report, migrants sent to their countries of origin about \$66 billion in 1989, the last year for which an estimate was available. This is only second to the oil industry as a component of

Indian economy. Pakistan gets a large part of its foreign exchange income from expatriates working in the Middle East. The impact of the expatriate Bangladesh nationals living in the Middle East, the UK and other countries, on our economic growth is less obvious perhaps because we have not been able to provide reliable investment outlet to them. But the importance of the foreign exchange that flows in regularly cannot be over emphasized.

Migration, however, is not just a cross border phenomenon. There is a massive migration taking place within national boundaries — from countryside to the cities. Each year, according to the UN report, between 20 million and 30 million of the "world's poorest people" move from rural areas

Vietnam : No Spoils for the Victor

Washington is still punishing Vietnam for winning war. Kunda Dixit of IPS reports from Ho Chi Minh City.

At the April IMF meetings in Washington, France, Australia and Japan tried to convince the United States to resume aid, but were unsuccessful. US officials finally agreed to a special meeting to debate the issue in June.

"It is a pity that the United States requested a postponement of these discussions," a Vietnamese foreign ministry spokesman, Phan Thuy Than, was quoted as saying in Hanoi recently. "It runs counter to the expectations and interests of international business circles, including (US) businessmen."

But some analysts here feel Hanoi could be over-estimating the clout US big business has in Washington, or the importance of Vietnam to some of the bigger transnational. France, Australia, Sweden and Japan have offered to help Hanoi settle its US \$140 million arrears with the IMF. This would make Vietnam become eligible for more lending, provided political hurdles can be overcome.

US senator and Vietnam War

veteran John Kerry was in Hanoi in May to clear up the sensitive issue of US servicemen missing in action during the war — one of the issues which have delayed the lifting of the embargo.

The Vietnamese cause was set back by the discovery of documents in Russian archives last month that showed North Vietnam was holding more prisoners than it freed in 1973.

That document has since been proven to be inaccurate, but US officials are peeved Hanoi has only now shown them a full list of prisoners, saying it was discovered recently. Kerry delivered a letter to Vietnamese President Le Duc Anh from Clinton which pledged to ease the embargo if full access to the documents is assured.

Many Vietnam-based foreign businessmen and diplomats say the issue of US missing in ac-

tion is just an excuse for Washington to keep on pushing a communist government that defeated it.

There are already hints from official US statements that after the MIA (missing in action) issue Washington is going to use human rights as a condition for lifting the embargo, said one European investor, visiting Ho Chi Minh City.

Businessmen here had thought Vietnam was dangle its fattest joint venture contracts in the oil industry for US companies to persuade Washington to lift the embargo.

But Hanoi seems to have got tired of waiting and in April awarded an exploration contract for offshore Dai Hung oilfield in Vietnam's southern continental shelf to an Australian firm.

There is debate about how badly Vietnam is hurt by the missing US investment, but

Manila-based ADB is also evaluating future projects. In a report on Vietnam in April, the bank said poor infrastructure could affect the country's growth potential.

"Improved availability of external assistance would enable more substantial and rapid progress, to be made in rectifying critical infrastructure deficiencies," the ADB said.

Not everyone agrees that lifting the embargo will be good. Some businessmen fear the competition will be so fierce once the US companies come in that Vietnam will not be worth the trouble.

Some orthodox communists within the party are also said to feel Vietnam, which has always been self-sufficient, does not need to turn itself into an IMF vassal. Lately they have been increasingly vocal in blaming the country's liberal investment policies for growing inequities in society, rising prostitution and corruption.

OPINION

An Appeal to Dr Kamal Hossain

As a resident of Faridpur, I would like to begin by extending my heartfelt apologies to Dr Kamal Hossain for the unpleasant incident surrounding his recent visit. In fact, having been in Dhaka that day, I would even confess to being fortunate that I did not have to witness the shameful events, for there is a strong possibility that I myself would have been assaulted while trying to prevent those events from happening. Having apologised though — not just personally but on behalf of most residents of this town — I would like to draw the nation's attention to some salient facts not covered by reports in the daily press subsequent to the incident. But prior to raising them, I would also like the readers to consider the general mood prevailing across the country as a whole and in rural areas in particular.

There is, above all, a sense of helplessness with regards to both economic survival as well as law and order. Or rather, disorder. Plus the feeling of a poor cousin getting fobbed off at the gate with a morsel of charity while inside (in this case, Dhaka) the banquet proceeds with great pomp and extravagance. Middlemen with manicured fingernails make millions while farmers go ignored. Youths, unemployed and frustrated, fall easy prey to such destructive substitutes as drugs and alcohol. Petty traders find themselves going bankrupt because local inhabitants have lost their purchasing power. A generation that has sacrificed so much to make this a free and independent nation watches on helplessly as collaborators crawl out of the woodwork claiming now to be the saviours. The disappointments are many and the sense of helplessness grows by the day and it is against such a backdrop that events relating to Dr Kamal's visit should be judged. And while I cannot swear to the validity of each fact, I can, from subsequent investigations, safely sum up the feelings and convictions of the townspeople on the day of the meeting. Beliefs that engendered the kind of reception that Dr Kamal was unfortunate to

walk into, and it is on behalf of the much maligned people of Faridpur that I would like to pose the following questions in the hope that they shall be answered.

One: being such a respected individual and a proclaimed democrat, not to mention a lawyer of international repute, would he call Mostafa Mohsin Montu democraat too — despite the fierce reputation that the gentleman has? If the answer is yes, what explanation would Dr Kamal use to back that definition? And if, as should be the case, the answer is no, then what is a man of his caliber doing in such company?

Two: how could the meeting of the Democratic Forum in Faridpur be convened by someone suspected by most of having been an active member of the local Peace Committee in '71? Out of courtesy to Dr Kamal, I shall not cast aspersions on some of the others gracing the platform that day but the gentleman who was the convener is one known in town for having sympathies for the collaborators — having said which I would hasten to remind Dr Kamal of two things: a) that in Bangladesh, rumors play as strong a part in events as facts and it is irrelevant, therefore, whether the convener is, in fact, an anti-liberationist or not. What is important is that he is generally believed to be so, and b) that a person is as much judged by his own character as by the company he keeps.

What is particularly painful is that Dr Kamal is nobody's fool and it is therefore difficult to accept ignorance as a defence.

In closing, I would make this plea to Dr Kamal. If ever this country needed transparent politics and honest leadership, now is the time. People are crying out for them and I would urge you to either step out of politics or play fair. In any case, the last thing the country needs is to lose people of your calibre to further subterfuge, further politicking for power's sake.

Shah Rahman
Chor Komlapur, Faridpur

To the Editor...

Free Market Economy

Sir, It has been some time since the state-controlled socialist model of economic development was decisively discredited in the former USSR and its satellites around the world. Economists, politicians and journalists who thought of the socialist path as a sure bet to Utopia can be forgiven for holding on to a fundamentally flawed economic concept during the Communist heydays of the '70s and '80s. After all the leftist propaganda machine was at work full time putting rosy white washes on a crumbling socio-economic system.

But this is now: How do our politicians, economists and journalists explain their continuing reluctance to support a total divestment of the bloated and inefficient state sector in Bangladesh? Do not our people deserve the benefit of better service than they get at state-controlled bank, Biman, or T&T? Do not they deserve the lower prices which are an inevitable consequence of deregulation and competition? Unfortunately, whenever a move towards denationalizing of a major unit has been planned (whether during the previous or the present regime), a phalanx of politicians and labour bosses have thwarted the overdue move. And their intransigence has been implicitly given credibility by the scholarly pieces of economists and intellectuals who are still culling from their lecture notes of the 1960s when socialism seemed to hold all the answers.

One doesn't need to look far to find suitable examples of what a hands-off approach by government can do to a nation's economy. To our east is Malaysia. Hardly an economic power in the 70s, today it has "the highest growth rate of any Asian economy. In our own region of the world, one needs to look only as far as Pakistan. It is little surprise that a

Pakistani economy liberated from the clutches of state regulation, is making its mark not only at home but in the emerging nations of Central Asia.

I, for one, have abundant faith in the entrepreneurial fibre of our countrymen. Freed from government intervention, I am confident, Bangladeshi businessmen will help create a miracle similar to that of Malaysia or Pakistan. Let the consumers have a choice of their own banks, airlines and telephone companies. If the goal is more jobs, lower prices and efficient economic units, then the inevitable road to take is marked with three signposts — denationalization, deregulation and competition.

For twenty long years Bangladesh has trusted its economic fate and political viability on a socialist economy. In consequence it has become a basket case. We cannot let the politicians and their cohorts in the academia and labour to take us on a socialist joyride anymore. It is time for a free enterprise, free market economy and, consequently, a more self-reliant nation which depends more on itself and less on the World Bank. As Nobel laureate economist Milton Friedman so aptly put it: "A free market is a necessary condition for political freedom." Time to put down Karl Marx and pick up Adam Smith.

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Hats off to Steffi!

Sir, Through your esteemed daily, I would like to congratulate Steffi Graf, on her brilliant pull-off at the Wimbledon Women's Final this year.

It was the 100th Women's Wimbledon Final, and probably, the most spectacular and breath-taking ever. The all-English grass court has once again proved that experience helps one to win the silver

salver. Steffi courageously escaped from the jaws of defeat. Watching Steffi reminded me of the fourth Test between Australia and the West Indies at Adelaide, which the Windies won by only 1 run! The Aussies needed only 186 runs, had 2 days and 10 wickets in hand. Surely, this was not a task at all for the giant Aussies. But no, the Windies bowled them out for 184 runs. The memory of the Bridgetown Test against South Africa, 1992 also speaks of escaping from the jaws of defeat.

Steffi did the same thing. Although Graf won the first set 7-6, she simply let away the second by a 1-6 margin. The third and final set was a real drama. Novotna was up by 4-1. Everyone, even Steffi thought that she had the match wrapped up. After that, it was sheer drama. Steffi seldom played a wrong shot. She won 5 games at a stretch to clinch her 5th title in 6 years and also to make a hat trick in the 100th Women's Wimbledon Final.

A big round of applause for Jana Novotna for putting up such a stubborn resistance against the queen for so long and a warmer applause for the German, Steffi Graf. Both have exhibited high drama at the 100th Women's Centre Court Final. But it was Steffi Graf who totally proved that "When the going gets tough, the tough really gets going." Hats off to you Steffi! Keep the form up for the US Open in August.

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Intermediate

College at Kotbari

Sir, Kotbari, a place of historical importance, has developed into a beautiful township worthy of being awarded the status of a Poursashava. Besides, the Rural Development Academy, Kotbari has a B Ed

College, a Technical Institute, a Cadet College, one of the biggest high schools in Comilla i.e. Laboratory High School and an Institute of Vocational Education. The Museum is situated at a distance of half a mile from Kotbari. The Regional Headquarters of BDR has been set up there. The Mainmatti Cantonment is extended up to Kotbari. New buildings, shops, super markets are being set up there and the House Building Finance Corporation has accepted Kotbari as an area for extension of loan facilities.

In spite of all developments, Kotbari does not have an Intermediate College and due to the absence of an Intermediate College, the girl students of Kotbari area, in most cases, have to give up education after SSC, a student has to spend at least Tk 300.00 per month on rickshaw hire if he/she gets admitted to a college in Comilla. No bus is allowed to run between Kotbari and Comilla by the rickshaw pullers.

The Laboratory High School has 58 rooms of which 20 are not required to be used. These 20 rooms are sufficient for opening an Intermediate College. If a Cadet College is allowed to function both as a High School and an Intermediate College, then the Laboratory High School at Kotbari may also be allowed to open Intermediate classes and the Head Master of the School if he is a Master Degree holder may be permitted to work as Principal of the Intermediate College in addition to his duties of the Head Master. Alternatively, voluntary service of the retired professors/officers may be accepted for starting the college and running it for a year or two. The well-to-do people of the locality are reportedly prepared to bear other expenses for running the college.

Will the Secretary and DG, Secondary Education, look into the matter sympathetically?
S A Bhuiyan
Baterbaria, Comilla