

A Council for Global Economy

The proposal for the creation of an Economic Security Council made by Jacques Delors, president of the European Community (EC) Commission last Sunday, merits careful consideration by a cross-section of developed and developing nations. The basic idea is to link the proposed council to the United Nations to monitor the world economy, to evaluate the work of various development-oriented agencies and to respond to the "challenge of interdependence," especially in the field of disparities and conflict of interests.

The proposal comes from an eminently qualified person. Apart from holding the highest position in EC, Delors is being considered as a strong potential candidate for the French presidential election in 1995.

The EC commission official who would like his proposal taken up at a special summit meeting in October has suggested that the proposed council should be as representative of different continents as possible. However, the composition of the body, like its terms of reference, remains a matter of detailed deliberation at the October summit—and later.

Delors speaks with growing disenchantment, widely shared by the international community, about the global economic situation. Most of the UN agencies concerned with trade and development are hardly moving forward, with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in despair over the ever-changing deadline for the conclusion of the Uruguay Round. The usefulness of UNCTAD is questioned, while the two giants in development, the World Bank and the IMF face increasing pressure on their resources.

Delors uses unusually strong expressions to vent his despair. He has rightly called the last summit of the seven industrialised nations as a "mountain that gave birth to a mouse", and he finds the EC as a "house in danger."

True, the immediate concern of the French expert may well be with problems facing the West, from the volatile currency situation to growing unemployment, from the aid to Russia to the US-EC differences. However, Delors, a socialist, puts considerable emphasis on the need for creating a framework for removing disparities between the developing nations and the affluent West.

The challenge facing the proposed council is to find ways of making it as effective as possible, capable of responding to the global needs. However, being autonomous in their operation, the UN agencies may not like their independence to be curbed. In the end, it may well mean that coordination among the agencies and evaluation of their activities at the proposed council or in any mechanism set up for the purpose could turn out to just another annual ritual. This would be counter-productive, surely not exactly what the EC Commission President has in mind.

To avoid undue disappointment caused by a possible failure of what is undoubtedly a forward-looking proposal, it is important that careful planning and hard thinking are done to work out the details, based on consultations with nations, UN agencies and experts from outside the world body. The UN Secretary General, Dr Butros Ghally whose own development priorities seem a little hazy—or perhaps overshadowed by his political concerns—must indeed take a major role in giving the proposal from Delors the thrust it needs, not to mention of the endorsement from the world body it requires. The UN has some good experts to start working on the idea, without losing time. Herein lies a test for the credibility of the UN—especially of the Secretary General—on the all-important question of development on a global basis.

Drive against Illegal Manufacturers

Two illegal factories producing adulterated ghee and glucose have been unearthed by the police in Keraniganj and Jinjira. In Rajshahi also, the police came up in their drive with a similar factory that had been producing adulterated mustard oil. The successive days—Thursday and Friday—drives by the police appear to be a part of a campaign against illegal manufacturing business in the country. According to one of the factory owners' own admission, he has been in the illegal practice for the past year. About the other two's operation period, the reports say nothing.

The successful police drives—both in Dhaka and Rajshahi—almost at the same time may be a coincidence but there is no doubt more such illegal manufacturers elsewhere in the country are engaged in this clandestine business putting at risk the health of their products' consumers. The unsuspecting consumers can do little to save themselves from such marketing ills. Needless to say that such secret and illegal operations cannot be conducted for long without tacit support from the legal branches. The underground rings, however strong they may be, cannot dodge the law enforcers if the latter are serious and mindful to their job.

It is good news that the authority concerned has at last become alive to the situation but to break the stranglehold of the fake manufacturers it will need more than just an usual anti-illegal-manufacturing drive. If the agency responsible for curing the disease itself becomes contaminated, success of the drive is bound to be suspect. No question however about the ingenuity of the fake producers, they can produce the exact copy of almost anything—ranging from blades to heavy machines—imported from abroad.

As for the local companies, the sooner they get market for their products the greater the pressure for compromising the quality. One reason is the unfair imitation of the product by a number of other companies or outright illegal facsimile brands flooding the market. All this can happen only because there is not enough supervision at the appropriate level. An effective step towards bringing order in this commodity chaos would be to make the approval of the Bangladesh Standard Testing Institution (BSTI) mandatory for all manufacturers, which should then be ably complemented by regular supervision.

Our Students and Our Future : Are We Really Concerned?

We seem to have totally lost our cultural values under which teachers were accorded a position next only to parents. Even in Europe and America, where teacher-student relations do not carry the quality of veneration, teachers are accorded the respect that their noble profession demands.

THE recent incident at Jahangir Nagar University has reminded us, once again, about the crisis in our education system. The incident seems to be quite different from other instances of student indiscipline. No one would condone unruly behaviour by students or, for that matter, by any section of the community but one could perhaps take a more lenient view of a spontaneous fracas which developed in the heat of the moment. This was not, it seems, such a case. According to press reports, it was a case of pre-meditated and calculated assault on the teachers and other authorities of the University. A cold-blooded crime such as this cannot be brushed aside on any pretext. It clearly shows the depth to which some of our students are capable of descending. According to press reports they belong to the Jatityabadi Chhatral Dal which, as the student wing of the ruling BNP, enjoys the patronage of the government. Quite apart from their party affiliation, one hesitates to refer to them as "students." Obviously they are not in the University for learning. No student worth the name would wear a mask and attack his teachers with deadly weapons.

We seem to have totally lost our cultural values under which teachers were accorded a position next only to parents. Even in Europe and America, where teacher-student relations do not carry the quality of veneration, teachers are accorded the respect that their noble profession demands. Over the years, it seems, our sensitivities have been blunted by the frequency of incidents in which teachers were assaulted by students. Is it not high time for us to pause and reflect on the whole issue? Which way are we heading? It is not, in my view, a matter of party politics. It is a symptom of a deep rooted and deadly malaise.

The seriousness of the incident in the Jahangir Nagar University is not questioned by anyone. The appointment of a Commission of Enquiry under a Supreme Court judge is a clear indication of the gravity of the crisis. Yet there was no statement from the government on the issue expressing disapproval of the conduct of the students. Surely the BNP does not condone violence in campus. If so, why the silence. Is it because the students alleged to be involved in the incident are Chhatra Dal followers? The appointment of a one-man Commission of Enquiry was no doubt a good step but why limit the inquiry only to the event of July 29 and why should the enquiry take three months and not three weeks? The event took place in broad daylight and presumably there are hundreds of witnesses. The people want to know the facts now and not at some future date. It was suggested to me that perhaps the patrons of the students hope that in three months' time the memory of the ugly event will fade from public mind. Perhaps it will, but my suspicion is that it is a mistaken belief. Public concern about violence and indiscipline in the educational institutions is not likely to diminish. In fact, incidents such as the one in Savar will soon turn the parents' anxieties into despair. However cleverly one may manipulate the media and try to "manage" the fall-out of such an incident, neither the parents nor the general public can be fooled for too long. Their children are at risk. They want their sons and daughters to receive good education; they want to train them as hooligans nor to receive their dead bodies.

The Commission's mandate

is very limited; such an incident does not take place out of the blue. There must be a background. One must examine the circumstances under which such a barbaric attack could be launched against the teachers. However, despite the limited scope of the enquiry, the public will no doubt await with interest the report of the Commission. The learned judge will, I am confident, objectively bring out the facts of the case. Meanwhile, what about the criminal law in force in the country? I was told that one of the students has been taken to

Ordinary people, irrespective of party affiliation, are deeply worried about the long-term implications of the incident.

The opposition parties have been complaining for quite sometime that the government is exercising its enormous powers under the anti-terrorism law against their workers and activists. The anti-terrorism law, it is being alleged, is frequently used for suppressing the opposition. There are reports of arrests and harassment of students and party workers if they are opposed to either the BNP or the Jamaat. It is difficult to

out bringing party politics into these basic administrative functions. In fact, crime in any form cannot be a part of politics of any party, be it in the government or in the opposition.

Students in developing countries and certainly in Bangladesh, have played a historic role in national emancipation. As the most conscious and idealistic section of the population the vast body of students have thrown themselves into such struggles without expectation of personal gain. The Language Movement of 1952 is clearly an example of an occasion when the students stood up against alien conspiracies against the very existence of our national cultural and identity. Similarly, many students bravely joined the Liberation War and played a heroic role throughout the struggle. But these are not ordinary events. Participation in such events which transcend party politics is justified in the long term interest of the nation. The fight against the previous autocratic regime was another important national issue. The students acted as the vanguard of the struggling mass.

But today no one wants to topple the government by agitation or any unconstitutional means. Fair election is the chosen method of the nation to install a new government. Peaceful succession and transfer of power is the very essence of a democratic system of government. So why the continued obsessive pre-occupation with student politics? Why the formation of armed student cadres? Who gives them arms? Why does the police force remain a silent spectator? Above all, why is there an attempt to capture, in fact, gain physical control of the colleges, dormi-

stories and Universities? Let us not fool ourselves. All this is not happening exactly spontaneously; the sources of support for the student activists is no secret. In consequence, other parties also feel that unless they fight back, they will suffer political disadvantage. The students, it is reasoned, are too important as pawns in the political chess game, for any party to surrender their use to the opponents only.

It is a truism to say that our future depends on our students. We all say this, regretfully, without any genuine conviction. If we really believed that the nation's fate hinges on the quality of education, on the level of discipline and competence of the new generation, we would not have allowed the kind of game that is going on. In that case, the government would have enlarged the scope of the Commission to determine the root cause of the rot that seems to have engulfed all the campuses. The opposition parties would also have extended full cooperation to these efforts. In fact, I sincerely hope that all the opposition parties will join in a national search for a solution to this problem. Our very future as a nation hinges on our ability to deal with this crisis.

Our goal should be to try to find the real problems of our educational institutions. Is it terrorism? Is it the excessive influence of a few professional student activists? Is it the distribution of arms to the cadres? Is it the partisan choice of Vice-Chancellors and other senior officers of the institutions? To my mind, we are looking at an abyss; we can pull ourselves up and deal with the problem only if we wake up from the sort of collective myopia that we are suffering from. It will be sad indeed if our leaders continue to indulge in partisan manoeuvre when our whole future is at stake.

Sudanese recruits. The Iranian-trained soldiers were later sent to the south to fight the Sudan People's Liberation Movement.

Furthermore, reports by organisations such as Amnesty International on human rights violation indicate that in order to guarantee its own survival, the regime was adopting methods of torture, harassment and preventive detention.

At the end of last year it became apparent that the Sudanese regime was desperately at the mercy of its Iranian paymasters, as intelligence reports from Sudan revealed the presence of Shia mullahs in Port Sudan and even in Khartoum, the Sudanese capital. Tehran was also allowed to set-up an "Islamic" radio station in Port Sudan with broadcasts in Arabic to be beamed to North Africa. As the Iranian presence in Sudan increased to the extent of allowing Iranian Shia Islam take over the Sunni precepts applied in Sudan for centuries, its neighbour Egypt became increasingly wary.

This added fuel to new reports reaching Cairo about the Sudanese plans of granting Iran naval military facilities north of Port Sudan on the Red Sea. The Saudi government panicked at the idea of having the Iranian navy a few miles from its maritime boundaries. The Egyptians threatened to bomb any military installation that its air force might locate in the Sudanese region of the Red Sea.

—GEMINI NEWS

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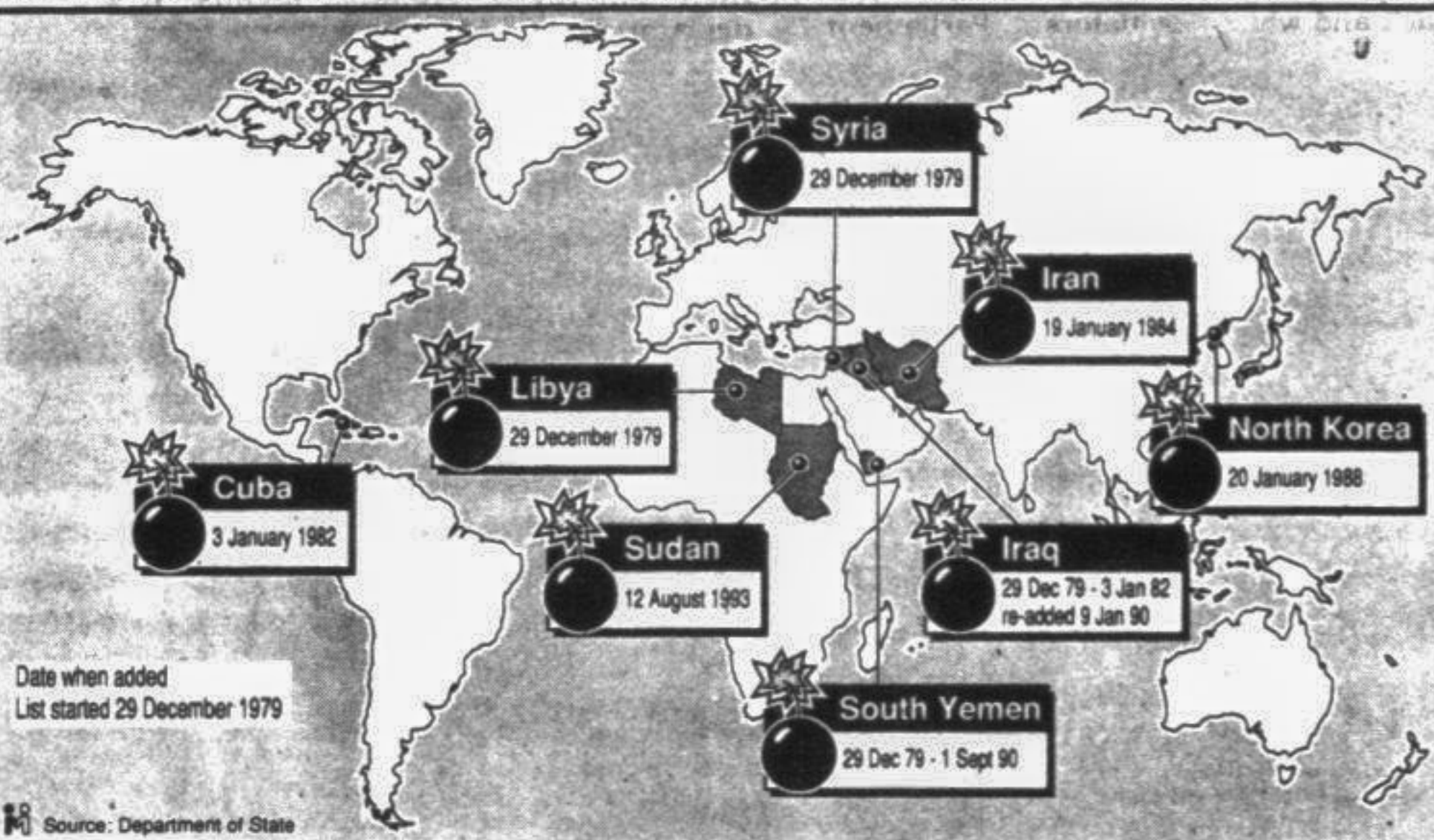
Why Sudan Action is a Signal to Tehran

by Eva Dadrin

The United States has added Sudan to the list of countries which it considers promote international terrorism. The action is likely to have little impact on the regime in Khartoum, already reeling under severe economic and political problems. For many years Washington had stopped all military and financial aid to Sudan. The real reason for the latest US action is to check the ambitions of Sudan's ally Iran.

Terror list

States considered by the US to be repeatedly providing support for acts of international terrorism



that, through its influence on the Islamic movements in Egypt and in Sudan, Tehran has succeeded in increasingly diverting the West's attention from the Gulf to the Red Sea. Tehran has used Sudan as a corridor to channel its religious and ideological ambitions to Arab and African countries. By doing so it expects to erode Egypt's leading position in the region and to undermine Saudi Arabia's leadership of the Muslim world.

It was the 1991 Khartoum conference, establishing the Arab and Islamic Peoples Congress (AIPC), that gave Sudan's Islamists an Iranian style vocation to proselytize

Islam in Africa.

The Sudanese Islamist movement under the guidance of Dr Hassan El Turabi, leader of the National Islamic Front and Secretary General of the AIPC, adopted the pan-Islamist message. It opened Sudan's doors to the Iranian political as well as cultural ascendancy.

When in December 1991 President Hashemi Rafsanjani visited Khartoum with an entourage estimated to be made up of more than 200 clerics and officials, the die was cast and the Iranian revolutionary machinery started rolling in a country devastated by civil war. According to intelligence reports

from Khartoum and Cairo, by February 1992 some 2,000 Iranian Revolutionary Guards had joined the 1,000 Lebanese members of the Iran-backed Hezbollah militia based in Khartoum.

Sudan was already harbouring the extremist groups of Abu Nidal, Hamas and George Habash. The same reports were mentioning that while 1,500 of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards were 'foot soldiers' the other 500 were highly trained officers who helped the Sudanese military regime to set up the Popular Defence Forces. Given full authority to conduct house searches, investigations and arrests, these units, modelled on the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, number today more than 100,000 and are assigned the sole task of protecting the regime.

In exchange, the regime granted facilities for training camps for new recruits of Hezbollah and Hamas. These camps, situated around Khartoum and in Kordofan and Darfur in the Western region, were "indoctrination" as well as "military training" camps for

OPINION

Education and Community Participation

Shahabuddin Mahtab

We have now completed forty-six years after the partition of India and more than two decades after the emergence of Bangladesh. In British India and also in the fifties and sixties, educational institutions were established on the basis of a felt need of the local community, and by its initiative. The eminent colleges like the Brojomohan College in Barisal and the Ananda Mohan College in Mymensingh, were built, brick by brick, by the generous benefactors and the community at large. The Bashiruddin Memorial College in Naogaon and the Mujibur Rahman Girls' College in Bogra were the products of generous donors and ceaseless voluntary service 'donated' by socially conscious people. The instances can be multiplied both in the case of secondary and higher education. The role of the government generally should be promotive and supportive, and the participation of the local bodies, local communities and the generous individuals has to be encouraged.

Local communities must be prompted and allowed to take greater responsibilities, because it is their children who are going to be benefited. In these cases the teachers will be able to stay at one place and, in most of the cases, of their own

tended hostel facilities, more particularly for the girls.

In several cases where we have upgraded a college to that of a University College, and also have opened up BA/B Sc honours courses and MA/MSc courses, there is already a severe shortage of qualified teachers which would take many years to be filled up. Besides we have to upgrade the qualifications of a large number of our teachers, and the UGC can play a pivotal role here.

The standards of our education have simply been shattered during the past several years, and this needs 'rehabilitation'. We have to monitor and evaluate the progress, and the quality of education that is being imparted in colleges and schools that have been nationalised since 1980.

While making the above observations, we are fully aware of the fact that the development of education, knowledge, skills and technology (human resources development) can only lift us from our present state of poverty. In the face of our acute resource constraint, we would suggest that 20% of our revenue budget and ADP be committed to the education sector. Our development and achievements are dependent on it, and there is no better choice.

To the Editor...

Uniform education

Sir, It is very heartening to note that Sheikh Hasina, the widely respected lady in our community and Leader of the Opposition in our Parliament has demanded uniform education system ensuring equal education facilities for all (news item in The Daily Star dt 26.6.93). But so far my knowledge goes I know that the venerable lady's both children, Joy and Putul receive education at a very costly institution in India. Isn't there a gap between what we preach and what we practice?

Sheikh Niamat Ali Shyamol, Dhaka

Teacher's memo with 10 errors

Sir, As reported in The Daily Star dated August 29, a 2-page memo issued by the teachers of a school in Key Largo with 10 errors in spelling, grammar and

syntax, outraged a guardian so much so that he sent a copy of the same to the Miami Herald so the paper could bring the lapses of the teachers to the notice of the general public and the authorities concerned for proper action. The gentleman should take consolation from the fact that we in Bangladesh are faced with more precarious situation. The error committed by the teachers in Key Largo has reduced our bitterness against poor knowledge of our own teachers whose professional abilities have awfully degenerated.

I have observed that ninety-five per cent of our teachers are unable to teach their students without taking help of 'notes' and 'keys' which are being sold in the market three times more than the text books. It's quite unjust to blame our students community alone for their poor knowledge.

The government of Bangladesh has recently decided to introduce English from class

one. It is doubtful whether efficient teachers in adequate number will be available or not, to cope with the situation. The government must prepare to take necessary steps beforehand to avoid further unpleasant situation in our educational institutions.

K R Zakhrul Khulna

BBC programmes

Sir, We are regular viewers of the BBC programmes on the TV. We think that the youngsters of our country can learn much from these programmes. We, therefore, request both the BTV and BBC authorities to extend their programmes upto 5:00 pm.

S A Salehin and S A Farhan Students of Scholastica, Dhaka