

Message from G-15 Summit

At the three-day summit of the Group of 15 (G-15) held in New Delhi from March 28, fears were expressed that a conflict between the rich and poorer nations on economic and developmental issues might erupt, bringing in an era of tensions like those the world witnessed during the days of the East-West Cold War. Although matters may not go that far, signs of a confrontation on trade issues between the leading industrial nations and the developing countries are very much in evidence.

The G-15 was formed by the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) in 1989 to foster economic cooperation among the developing countries and help them speak with one voice at world forums. The Group's membership spans Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. It was the Group's fourth summit.

The New Delhi summit called upon the leading industrial nations to desist from linking trade to labour standards. It was felt that such a move would derail the signing of the Uruguay Round global trade accord in Morocco later this month. Disagreement between the developing countries and the rich nations on the inclusion of a provision on labour standards and social protection for workers in the final text, is holding up the last stage of the process of concluding the global accord on trade. Developing countries are wary of the move, spearheaded by the United States, as they are afraid that such a clause in the global trade agreement might be used by the rich nations to shut out of their markets low-cost goods from Asia, Latin America and elsewhere, on the ground that these were produced with cheap labour in an environment of poor working conditions.

The G-15 summit warned that if the rich nations persisted in their effort to inscribe additional issues like labour standards, in the global trade accord, they might unravel the package of agreements concluded through the long-drawn Uruguay Round of negotiations. Such an eventuality could jeopardise the global trading system, they cautioned. The latest round of the talks on this issue, being held in Geneva, is reported to have failed. However, the negotiators would probably meet again to try to find a compromise on the dispute, before the upcoming ministerial conference in Morocco. Let us hope that the rich nations would show more flexibility this time around.

On the conclusion of their meeting, the G-15 leaders also called for a permanent seat for a developing nation in the UN Security Council. This is a long-standing demand of the developing countries, being voiced through NAM in particular. Nonetheless, as of now, such an event looks most unlikely to come about in the foreseeable future.

The G-15 summit reaffirmed the commitment of the developing nations to South-South cooperation. Yet, there are reasons to doubt how meaningful and active, cooperation among the developing countries had been. For one thing, the summit was also notable for the thinness of attendance of heads of states and governments from the member countries. The summit had been due in December but had to be postponed as only a few of the top leaders of the Group said that they would attend. Even the delayed meeting in March was attended by only seven heads of states and governments.

It is said that the developing countries are more interested in joining regional trade blocs. For instance, Mexico, a member of G-15, had earlier joined the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) establishing a linkage with the United States and Canada. The other day, Mexico joined the Paris-based Capitalism's club, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development — better known as the OECD.

The North-South divide is still very much there. Developing countries would neglect cooperation among themselves only at their own peril.

Ticketless Journey : Another Kind

Buses and mini-buses have long done away with tickets as a receipt of fare for travelling on intercity routes or short routes connecting the city with places around it. This could indeed be put forth as an evidence of a newly developed environment of trust between the travelling passengers and the bus employees but for the unfortunate incidents that take place from time to time between them.

There is however no reason to think that the bus owners and transport workers are reluctant to keep to the system of ticketing without a deeper reason. The reason, of course, is financial and an attempt to skirt around legal provisions requiring payment of tax. On this count, the buses and mini-buses have found a convenient way of imposing on passengers fares in excess of the fixed rates the government decided in 1989. A report carried in a vernacular daily has given details of how the passengers are made to pay more than the due.

The report has come up with startling results in that the excess fares collected from the passengers of Mirpur-Gulistan routes amounted to Tk 126,000,000 at the end of a year. Tk 120,000,000 is for the same on Gulistan-Narayanganj road. The excess amounts realised illegally from the passengers go unaccounted for and the only losers in the process become the passengers and the government. The transport workers and the owners of the vehicles thrive on this manifestly distorted system of fare collection. The government appears to have resigned to it and allowed the chaos to reign.

The men running the vehicles cannot but be motivated by profits. No question about that. But then the people and the government also have their interests here. Neither can forfeit its own. The plea on which the fares were enhanced is no more valid. The fares shot up following the increase in petrol or fuel price in the aftermath of the Gulf war. But when the oil price fell, the fares were not lowered at all. The government in its bargain with the transport owners has lost, so has its control over the transport sector slackened. That it has failed to implement its own fare charts and thus give the passengers a fair deal shows its inherent weakness. People cannot be loser for ever, nor can the government lose out to vested interest groups. Some strong measures have to be taken for bringing order in the transport sector. Introduction of tickets in public buses and meters in scooters and taxis will be a first step towards that end.

The Changing Global Landscape : Some Reflections

by Muhammad Shamsul Huq

THE euphoria unleashed by the end of the cold war obscured many phenomena which occurred concurrently and were a negation of human and democratic values. The political and economic dynamic of the contemporary world order indicated the need for an objective evaluation of the global changes and their gradually unfolding implications.

President Bush did not elaborate the concept of world order he envisioned in the aftermath of the Gulf War. His administration reportedly envisaged a 'base force' proposal to support a 1.6 million strong military over five years at a cost of \$1.2 trillion a year. It foresees building a world security arrangement which by implication would prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and ensure that no rival superpower would contest US political and military superiority.

It is a fact that the emergence of the USA as the sole superpower has naturally placed her in an enviable position of advantage politically and militarily. But, the architecture of the international structural change and power configuration appears to have undergone a transformation unleashing forces of violence and instability not foreseen before the demise of the Soviet Union. Unipolarity or by-polarity in power-configuration appears to be of little consequence to the emerging problems bedeviling the former members of the Soviet Union and many other regions of the world. An in-depth analysis of the contemporary world order would reveal complexities and paradoxes with many syndromes characterising the cold war era. Notable among them are:

(i) For all practical intents and purposes, North America and West Europe have been the main beneficiaries of the 'peace dividends' accruing

from the end of the cold war era.

(ii) The question seems to linger: Has the 'cold war era' actually ended? Russia claims and maintains the posture of a superpower. However, she and her sister republics of erstwhile Soviet Union are evidently in deep trouble in terms of both political and economic security. The CIS umbrella did not prove to be a strong enough shield in coping with the threats to their political and economic security. Their transition from socialism to capitalism appears to have placed them in a state of disarray. (This is in contrast to the people's Republic of China following a policy of step-by-step liberalization.)

(iii) In Russia the economic crisis appears to have brought about a swing in the public opinion. The ultra rightists and the communists have already emerged as the majority in parliament. If these anti-reformists succeed in capturing the political power and the command of the huge stockpile of nuclear arms located in Russia and a number of her sister republics, the future of the world order becomes uncertain and unpredictable.

(iv) Progress in arms reduction between Washington and Moscow marked a welcome halt to the arms race which during the cold war period caused a serious threat to peace and security. Concurrently outside Europe and North America the arms race has assumed an alarming magnitude. Trade in arms produced and sold by the industrially developed countries to feed the arms race and militarism in many regions exacerbating regional tension and instability.

(v) Curiously enough, the post cold war era is marked by armed conflicts sparked and fed by ethnic, religious and linguistic differences, in some cases leading to the break-up of states and repression of human rights. The most tragic

example is Tito's Yugoslavia. These conflicts tragic for the peoples involved posed no threat to the core national interests of the United States and the western democracies, nor did they directly infringe on their security interests. The withdrawal of American military presence from a number of conflict-torn regions, more recently from Somalia and her unwillingness to become militarily involved in Bosnia indicate that the United States is not prepared to use her military capability unless warranted by her perceived core national interests and justified in cost-benefit terms. It would, thus, be incorrect to think that the UN/American victory in repelling aggression in Kuwait had ushered in a new era in which the international community could be expected to act to halt the use or the threat of the use of force.

(vi) The post cold-war era was marked by a spectacular shift in economic power configuration and the emergence of East Asia as the world's leading growth centre. Admittedly geo-economics was a striking contemporary phenomenon impinging profoundly on the central arena of world affairs. Free trade economics has generated progressively growing economic co-operation, factor-flows and the enlargement of the market economy. However, global productivity has suffered a general decline. Slow growth of the world economy during the post cold war period provided a new impetus to nationalism, regionalism and protectionism in various forms. The United States, though still the largest economy globally, has ceased to be the single dominant economic power and faces challenges from the economic strength of Japan and the European community and also to some degree from the Asia-pacific

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(vii) In like manner economic development, an imperative for the survival of democracies in newly emergent developing states, is clearly threatened by the policy that the industrially advanced countries continue to pursue to control the international financing institutions in the light of their perceived national interests. The international financing institutions are observed often to be guided by the political interests of the industrial countries in attaching conditionalities in the grab of structural adjustment, with little regard to the vulnerability of the fledgling democracies.

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The following observation of a western analyst (Graham Hancock in *Lords of Poverty*) appears to be pertinent in this context: 'In order to achieve the admirably clear and simple

goal of increasing a country's revenues and reducing its expenditures, structural adjustment will typically involve all, or most, of the following: austerity measures; devaluation of the local currency (because, in theory, this will discourage imports by making them more expensive — and provide a stimulus to exports); draconian cuts in government expenditure, particularly spending on education and health care; radical reduction or complete elimination of food and other consumption subsidies; measures like reductions in wages and restrictions in the availability of credit, which are also designed to reduce the overall level of consumption within "adjusting" societies; across-the-board abolition of price controls, coupled with privatisation of public utilities and immediate price increases for the services they provide like water, electricity, etc.; and finally, higher taxes and higher interest rates.'

Some Conclusions

It is now evident that the leadership in Russia and other republics of the former Soviet Union underestimated the strength of the social, economic and political structures built over nearly eight decades. (On the other hand, the Chinese strategy of liberalisation in stages stands out in sharp contrast.) If the reformists in Russia and her sister republics are to succeed, adequate support, both moral and financial, must be quickly forthcoming from the rich western democracies.

Another reality is that the developing countries would also continue to be plagued by conflicts of varying intensity rooted in ethnic, linguistic, religious and regional factors. They are essentially problems inherent in the very nation-building process and linked to the problems of national development and national integration. These threats to na-

tional security can be best met not by increased military might, but by faster development through more beneficial cooperation. It was this perception that inspired the late president Ziaur Rahman's initiative for the establishment of the SAARC. It cannot, however, be overstressed that developing countries must have adequate access to the world market and world resources.

There must be a paradigm shift from the colonial policy of controlling the world economy to partnership in the use and management of world resources for the benefit of all mankind and protection of the world environment.

The overall world scenario warrants a rethinking on the very categories of the concept and structure of security imperatives. Military might by itself has ceased to be a viable option in ensuring national security. Economic and environmental contents of security loom larger than ever.

In this changing global scenario, a shift in ethos with an emerging and progressively predominant human content is imperative in interstate relations. More than ever before, nations need to be aware of their shared security concerns with their global dimensions, linked to a new power-equation in which nations, big and small, are partners in sustainable development. Hopefully, all actors on the international scene will work in concert in strengthening the efforts towards the emergence of a new international regime in which peoples of all nations can blossom and prosper in peace and harmony with themselves and their environment.

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ing of Liaquat Ali Khan. He made the odyssey to the Land of the Pure. The rest is history, in that conventional manner of speaking. Within the ambience of that history comes the rather solitary struggle of S M Mursheed.

The struggle slowed down as the Pakistani military went on a genocidal spree in a part of the country whose people had voted only months earlier, for democracy. In free Bangladesh, Mursheed seemed to opt for silence. He emerged from his state, in early 1975, to win Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman that Baksal was an invitation to disaster. He returned to silence, perhaps distressed at the decline of politics in the country all through the seventies. Ayub Khan's disciples were running the show. Mursheed's twilight came as all beauteous things in the land of Bengal went into retreat in that season of unmitigated sadness.

Justice S M Mursheed : A Tribute

by Syed Badrul Ahsan



Justice S M Mursheed: April 3, 1994 is his 15th anniversary of death

I have often asked myself why Justice S M Mursheed went into a state of silence in the seventies. And I have not yet been able to come up with an adequate response to that inquiry. But why do I raise the question in the first place? That is again something which takes me back to a particular stage in all our lives, a moment in history which brought out some of the more glorious attributes in all of us. It was a time when the dictatorship of Field Marshal Ayub Khan was beginning to come apart at the seams. All the symptoms of decline were there: the regime was trapped in its insidious move to trap Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a kangaroo court, it was embarrassing itself through trying to humiliate Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in custody. All the signs were of things portentous, for the military and their friends. Even so, the cable was not quite ready to give up. That is the beauty of Philistines trying to govern a country. They know not that there is about politics and statecraft a certain degree of the aesthetic. At the end of 1968, whatever was aesthetic in the life of the people of Pakistan had got lost deep in the confines of authoritarian ignorance; and yet the man who had not flinched in the job of occupying his own country ten years earlier was busy convincing himself that it was perfectly all right to eavesdrop. He made Pakistanis believe that his decade in power was really a millennium. At least his friends thought it was. And then came the crash. The streets began, inexorably, to take, upon themselves, a look of meanness. That only led to more of the uncouth from the regime.

And this is where S M Mursheed came in. He walked into politics, as if to inform anyone who would listen that

the one unequivocal manner in which a man can serve his country is to take the plunge into politics. But, and here is a thought, would Mursheed have come into politics had things been different? It is never a good idea trying to answer questions about what might have been. But what appears to have been the true way back in 1968 was that men like Mursheed and Asghar Khan were conscious of the vacuum setting in with the absence of the country's premier politicians. They were in incarceration, weren't they? And there was too the fear in Mursheed that the course politics was taking in Pakistan was rather ominous. The regime had made it difficult for opposition to be conducted constitutionally. But that, to Mursheed, was no justification for a people struggling for a reassertion of democracy to slide consciously into conditions of anarchy. Mursheed's moral links with constitutionalism, with the concept of rule of law, came into his approach to active

politics. I would like to think it was this comprehension of objective reality which made him tell the country in the twilight of 1968 that he was there to contribute to the job of a restoration of the democratic ethos. The credibility of the man was beyond question, in both East and West Pakistan. And that was surely a reason why in the early part of 1969, as the Ayub government began to crack on the streets of Dhaka and Karachi and everywhere, men of serious intent toyed with the thought of Justice Mursheed taking over from the beleaguered dictator. The idea did not have time enough to be put into tangibility, for events quite overwhelmed everyone. What if Mursheed had indeed succeeded Ayub Khan to the presidency of Pakistan? True, he would be a transitional figure. But it would be a momentous transition, and president Mursheed would certainly have brought a degree of flair in the task of healing the wounds and the divisions in the Pakistani body politic. He would not have messed up things the way a second generation of generals in West Pakistan, was to do in 1971.

Yes, these are all thoughts, pretty improbable thoughts. We will let go of them, lest we stand accused of glorifying a man who would have little to empathise with in paenae to deification. But if Mursheed cannot, must not be glorified, he should certainly be remembered for the kind of being he was. Aware throughout the course of his life of the necessity of culture, he gave short

shrift to men with little minds. In 1961, he reminded Bengalis on this side of the political divide that Rabindranath Tagore went beyond the narrow confines of communal politics. Which was one great reason why he went all the way to ensure, with the force of his moral and physical presence, an undisturbed observance of the poet's centenary of birth. It was a moment of renewal for the Bengali, and Mursheed could not stay away from it. And in the perspective of history, that event — bringing as it were Bengalis of all secular persuasions together — was to serve as a springboard to freedom a decade later. In 1961, then, S M Mursheed was reminding himself as well as Bengalis that courage was all.

OPINION

"... And All this while the Nation was Waiting"

Abu Taher Majumder

Mahfuz Anam deserves most hearty congratulations for his intrepid, dispassionate, analytical, and patriotic commentary under the above caption. While it faithfully records his indignation at the stalemate in the last Parliament and boundless concern for its effective working, it, at the same time, positively reflects his love for proper parliamentary practices and desire for enlightening and fruitful leadership from both the party in power and the opposition. He has, in fact, embodied in his commentary the strong and sincere desire of all lovers of parliamentary form of government and its effective functioning.

It is very unfortunate that most of our leaders behave in a way which does not become anybody who can be described as a leader. Our public representatives who have been elected to the Parliament must act worthily and must uphold public interest by subduing their sense of pride, ego, whims, unreasonable notions and learning the ideals of humility, self-sacrifice, sincere and whole-hearted dedication. Self-seeking leaders are always condemned to oblivion and hated by the right-minded people. If they are mentioned, that is done only as bad examples to be cautiously avoided.

The abiding sense of responsibility and genuine commitment to the causes of the country must be reflected in what our leaders do and say. We are generally accustomed to hearing high-sounding words about such lofty ideals as patriotism, dedication, commitment, etc. which are, more often than not, belied by the activities of the persons who utter such words. Such people, in fact, wear masques of positions and education (degrees) to hide their real selves and deceive people. We really do not want "callous, bungling, and inept political novices", nor do we want "arrogant,

pompous and inflexible" leaders bent on having its way to the very last comma and full stop, regardless of the cost and consequence to the parliamentary process, and to our nascent democratic experiment. Our leaders must remember, for our people want them to, that no "severe wrong doing" can be remedied or counterbalanced by any kind of "overkill". If leaders are bereft of tact, foresight, circumspection and insight and fall "hook, line and sinker" into any "trap", we have reason to lament our fate as a nation. It is really very regrettable that the representatives whom the people have voted to power do not know when to "relent" and when to wage a "semantic battle". Proper timing for all actions, great or small, is one of the most crucial factors for achieving any measure of success both at the individual and the national level. It is because of the lack of sense of timing that the whole 13th session of the 5th Parliament was turned into a total non-event". While the government contributed to "trivialising" it, the opposition "immobilised" it.

Mahfuz Anam has very rightly questioned the role of the Prime Minister as a Leader of the House and Prime Minister of the country, who wears "three caps simultaneously — that of the Prime Minister, Leader of the House and BNP chief". She must realise that there is no "magic formula" to enable her to do justice to all these three vital positions. To appropriate all powers to one's own self is not democracy. This also leads us to the role of Sheikh Hasina which should also be based on reason and good sense. The question that looms large in such a context is: "How are these two leaders going to make parliamentary democracy successful when there is

gas cylinder blast

Sir, About one year back while travelling by coach from Dhaka to Rajshahi I saw two gas cylinders kept on the roof of the vehicle. I raised objection and cautioned about any mishap. But the bus conductor and the passenger who owned the cylinders laughed at me, the rest of the passengers kept silent and they did not care at all for what I said. All the time I was in tension in the journey. However, we reached Rajshahi.

Back to Dhaka I observed many times people carrying 2-3 gas cylinders on the roof of the buses as well as on the rickshaws. I also saw balloon vendors moving from one place to another pushing a cart with gas cylinder.

After some weeks there was a gas cylinder blast at Jai Kali Mandir Road in front of the Osmany Hotel. Four people or more were killed and double the number injured.

This time another gas cylinder has exploded at Narinda not far off from