

It is an Educational Crisis

It has dragged on for two and a half months. The arithmetic of misfortune reads appalling. More than two lakh non-government secondary school and college level teachers keeping away from educational institutions means that 80 lakh students are going without the benefit of their teaching...

The SSC tests, the first major series of public examinations, were conducted chaotically without the professional supervision of trained teachers. Moreover, the marking of scripts, which is the essence of what examinations are all about, is in novice hands. The evaluation process is bound to be suspect because it has admittedly miscarried.

A close look at the origin and development of the crisis convinces one that it is more a mis-handling of the issue rather than the impossibility of meeting the teachers' demands that has brought us to this pass. The teachers' four-point list of demands boils down to seeking comparable benefits with those being received by government school and college teachers.

Now, in choosing negotiators from the teachers' side the Education Ministry allegedly preferred to talk to a particular group of teachers which made the liaison committee, representing the vast majority of teachers, feel ignored.

Now, the teeming multitude of students and their parents are least interested in the recriminatory political gamesmanship. The teachers who hit the streets coming from nooks and crannies of the country are respectable people suffering a good deal as has been poignantly underscored by the fatal heart attack which took the life of Head Master Shahjada Sikdar.

An Enormous Loss

According to a report carried in a vernacular daily, at least six southern districts have been facing a problem of chronic malnutrition suffered particularly by mothers and children there. So widespread and pervasive has the nutritional deficiency become that no less than 200 patients falling prey to it come everyday to seek remedy for their problems at the outdoor of each of the district hospitals.

Now two things are noticeable here. Mothers and children are the worst victims. Secondly, there is a rising trend of malnutrition and the diseases that bear a direct relation to it. The report has concentrated on a particular area in the south of the country and has come up with an alarming finding (or is it alarming in this country?).

Clearly, in societies where there are no social benefits for mothers and children, the problem becomes really acute. And there is no reason to think that the south of the country is the only place to have faced such a crisis owing to lack of food and nutrition. The majority of our rural population suffer from this shortage.

The average fall in growth by four inches could not be possible had the majority population had enough nutritious food to eat. In fact, only a fortunate few are making the most of everything at the cost of such widespread deprivation. Social justice has become the first casualty. Today everyone seems to have turned a blind eye to this enormous national loss.

Unless this trend is reversed we surely will head for a catastrophe. Perhaps a social welfare benefit for mothers and children of the most vulnerable class can be considered a short-term urgent measure. But for a long-term solution to the problem, a structural reform will be in order.

How Long will UN and Western Leaders Play with Fire?

by AMM Shahabuddin

WHEN Rome was burning, only one Nero was fiddling. But when Bosnia-Herzegovina has been burning, for the last two years, several of our 20th century Neros are not only fiddling but also are playing with fire.

Recently hell was let loose in Gorazde, one of the six so-called UN-designated 'safe havens' for the Bosnian Muslims. This was not the first time that a so-called safe haven was raided and destroyed.

The Serbs who roughly constitute 30% of the total population, had already occupied 70% of the territory, according to a set plan, to terrorise the Muslims and thereby hasten their operation of 'ethnic cleansing'.

Knowing fully well that 65,000 Muslim residents were unarmed and helpless, the Serbs attacked the city with tanks, guns and other heavy weapons to annihilate the populace.

After the long four-plus decades of division left by Britain, the two neighbours have developed a large pile of nuclear weapons to deter attacks by one against the other. Both the countries are also either believed to have manufactured nuclear weapons or could easily take the steps in time of severe conflict in that direction.

forces. They immediately complied. This sort of duplicity on the part of UN was bitterly criticised by the Bosnian Prime Minister alleging that UN or NATO didn't come forward when they were needed most.

The question is who gave the Serbs such a free hand to commit genocide, massacre and mass rapes when they started the game two years back? The famous American columnist Anthony Lewis of the New York Times taking part in a debate on Bosnia, called George Bush a 'gutless wimp' for 'letting the Serbs overrun Bosnia'.

Serbs: Lairs, Cheats and Soundrels

During the last two years or so, the Serbs had killed more

Let them take off their benevolent masks and openly side with the Serbian dream of a Greater Serbia. They should give up their double-role of 'hunting with the hounds and running with the hares.' An open enemy is better than a disguised one.

than 200,000 men, women and children, raped thousands of women and destroyed property worth billions of dollars just to force the Muslim government of Bosnia to surrender, sign on the dotted line dictated by them.

forever. That's the dictum they believe in.

Clinton's Policy and Europe

President Clinton from the beginning has tried to evolve his Bosnian policy. During his campaign as a presidential candidate, he said in August that, 'History has shown that you can't allow mass extermination of people and just sit by and watch it happen.'

ren Christopher took off for Europe, after a four-hour policy session in Washington, to sell the Clinton idea to his European allies and Russian, although Clinton knew well that the European leaders were sharpening their own weapons to cut Clinton to his proper size.

pher flew to Europe, the Serbian leader, Radovan Karadzic, who had been opposing the Vance-Owen plan on some plea or other, suddenly arrived in Athens to sign the plan.

What a timely Volte Face (Guess who were the background musicians). The whole scenario changed overnight, rather abruptly. The trump card was laid to thwart Clinton's move.

So Warren Christopher was made an 'April Fool' on May 11 Clinton had to calm down with his proposal when new peace prospects were shown to him.

the world to witness. There was another unexpected volte-face by the Serbian leaders. This time it was done by the so-called self-styled Parliament of the Serbs. They totally rejected the Vance-Owen plan as they were reluctant to hand over an inch of occupied land to the Bosnian government.

the problem. The Bosnian government has, however, taken a 'do or die' vow against the Serbian onslaughts not to submit to the notorious western plan to divide Bosnia and thereby cripple the Bosnian Muslims for good.

New efforts are again afoot for the solution of the Bosnian impasse. If the European leaders can't tolerate a 'lone' Muslim state in Europe, they should speak it out. Let them take off their benevolent masks and openly side with the Serbian dream of a Greater Serbia.

Policy of Appeasement: Danger Ahead

In fact, the policy of appeasement has never been able to stop aggression nor a devastating war. History is replete with such instances. Had it been so, former British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain would have been the most successful peace negotiator and peace-maker and the world could have been saved from the catastrophe of World War II.

So from here where do we go? Perhaps the European leaders would stop fiddling when the entire Muslim population is totally 'cleansed' from Bosnia. If the future of Europe is left in the hands of European leaders, this is bound to happen.

After the failure of the Christopher mission to Europe last year, an US Administration official gave a nice re-

sponse of the situation. He was reported to have said that it was not surprising that 'we were bluffing' (of air strikes), so they voted against Athens agreement. Putting emphasis on America taking leadership, he said: 'As it is, we looked like beggars (before the European leaders), when we know from experience that the allies will fall in line if we toughly set out what we are going to do. This business of the President saying 'we can't lead if the allies won't follow' ignores the lessons of the past 40 years.'

US Leadership on Trial

The Summum bonum of this is that the US policy should not be tinged by the vested interests of others. The US as a world policeman should lead, and not be led. The famous US columnist Anthony Lewis said last year: 'Credibility is undermined if petty tyrants treat the US with contempt and get away with it. And that is exactly what the Serbian leaders are doing in Bosnia.'

There has been much misuse or wrong use of the UN during the Reagan-Bush regime. Let there be a proper use of the UN this time during Clinton Administration to punish the aggressors and ensure the integrity, independence and sovereignty of a member-state of the UN.

The writer is a retired UN official.

India-Pakistan Nuclear Tension — a Road to Disaster

by Md Akramuzzaman

IN the post-cold war political context, the existing nuclear tension between India and Pakistan has reached a level at which they might endanger the most remarkable political stability and peaceful atmosphere in the South Asian region.

After the long four-plus decades of division left by Britain, the two neighbours have developed a large pile of nuclear weapons to deter attacks by one against the other. Both the countries are also either believed to have manufactured nuclear weapons or could easily take the steps in time of severe conflict in that direction.

Pakistan possesses at least 5-6 nuclear weapons since the early 1980s. Many nuclear specialists opine that a lethal nuclear weapon can be developed without testing like the type of atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima during the Second World War which had never been tested.

In the early days of 1990, the two countries reached a precipice over Kashmir when a simmering campaign for independence erupted into a full scale guerilla war between Indian security forces and the Kashmiri Muslims.

When the cold war reached its pinnacle in 1950s, tension arose even in South Asia and its security was threatened by the super powers' expansionism. Later, due to US involvement with Pakistan and Soviet involvement with India during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971, the balance of power was maintained in this region but with the experience of war specially the

defeat of West Pakistan the power balance was again disturbed that ultimately convinced the US of the need to maintain closer relationship with Pakistan and smaller state like Pakistan chose to remain with in the US security umbrella. The Afghan situation pushed Pakistan and the USA closer to each other.

At the same time India, which has the world's seventh largest fleet of sub-marines and fourth largest military capability had already been tempted to dominate South Asia and South West part of Indian Ocean through its naval power. Moreover, due to the rapid communist expansionism in the neighbouring West Asia specially in Afghanistan in 1979, the security guide-posts

of the region were threatened which led Pakistan to aspire for acquiring and building up high-tech defence capabilities. Thus the emerging security structure of South Asia bore portents of de-stabilization and destruction. It was almost an imperative for both parties—India and Pakistan—to enter into co-existence with the US and Soviet Union for maintenance of power balance and thereby to ensure their security and the security of South Asia as well.

In the late 1980s, Washington dramatically increased the supply of heavy war machinery and modern weapons to Islamabad for backing the Afghan Mujahidin fighters against the Soviet installed government of president Nazibullah. At the same time, the Soviet Union of India continued to serve as an important arms supplier to India.

Later, with the triumph of US guided Mujahidin fighters in the Afghan war and the Soviet withdrawal from the

battleground in 1989, the US policy toward Pakistan abruptly reversed course consequently, in the early 1980s, US started aggressively intervening with Pakistan to prevent her from developing nuclear weapons which it had obtained secretly from France under a military agreement in 1957.

Furthermore, Washington made a strong bid to persuade Islamabad not to take the fateful step which reportedly threatened to sever the diplomatic ties with Washington. Since 1986, due to the continuation of Pakistan's nuclear programme, US suspended economic and military aid to Pakistan squeezing it to roll back the programme. US officials believe that Pakistan for several years had secretly been building nuclear weapons by importing nuclear technology and materials from neighbouring China even. China has made it dear to the US that it would never be a nuclear exporting country. Since the India-China war of 1962 China had maintained close ties with Pakistan.

With the break-up of Soviet Union and the demise of cold war, US policy in South Asia appears to be to prevent war and avert nuclear arms race in the subcontinent. US would also like to broadly expand its trade in the region, conducive to its economic goals. She may seek a cohesive SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) that is friendly to the US.

Today, emotional tension and mutual suspicion between India and Pakistan have swollen like a tidal wave sweeping over the relations between the two neighbouring countries which may ultimately move towards a nuclear clash if the trend is not reversed firmly. To avoid the disaster, both the countries should act with caution staying away from misunderstanding that would hurt them both. They must realise that an improvement in their bilateral ties will not only be good for them it will also create stable conditions in the whole of South Asia.

The writer is a student of International Relations, Dhaka University.

To the Editor...

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.

Sheikh Hasina's pledge

Sir, Awami League chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina in her recent parley with the representatives of the Federation of Bangladesh Shopowners Association disclosed that she would try to avoid hartals in future to safeguard the interests of the business community. She, however, argued in favour of hartals for adequate state-media coverage which we feel should be the prime concern of the ruling BNP at the moment.

Sheikh Hasina told the business delegation that hartal was the only means to convey her message directly to the countrymen. She alleged that national electronic media like radio and television were fully controlled by the ruling party leaving little scope for the Opposition to project its views.

What the Leader of the Opposition had sounded is not totally unfounded. Neither it can be judged as an isolated phenomenon under the existing political turmoil as a sequel to which the Opposition is still boycotting the sessions of the Jatiya Sangsad.

It is pertinent to mention that the people had to struggle relentlessly for nine years to set up a stable democratic system in the country which had paved the way for BNP to come to power. And the people had an expectation that the media (specially the electronic) should be free to invite both the ruling and the Opposition leaders to a common platform of development and thus forge a consensus. But in reality it has failed to do so.

Hasina is never adequately covered by the state media. Sometimes, it becomes difficult to realise that there is the existence of a political Opposition in the country. Bereft of media coverage as deserved by the Opposition Leader, if she says that hartal is the only way to convey her message to the people she may not be taken amiss.

The government should, therefore, take steps to extend the duration of the TV coverage of the Opposition leaders in general and Sheikh Hasina in particular, to desist the latter from calling hartals repeatedly.

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Laws that permit inequality

Sir, I have gone through the article of Ms Nazmun Ara Sultana under the caption 'Laws that permit inequality' published in your esteemed daily of March 26. Ms Sultana has cited some examples of inequality in our laws, particularly the Muslim Law of Inheritance which determines inter-alia the shares of male and female in the properties left behind by a deceased.

The writer mentions that under the prevailing Muslim Law of Inheritance female's share in property is much lesser than her male counterpart. Such as, on the death of father and mother, daughter gets half of the share of son. On the death of husband, wife gets one eighth of the property left, while on the death of wife, husband gets one-fourth of the wife's property etc. The writer, in the concluding lines of her article, has urged upon the voluntary organizations to raise women's consciousness to remove these and other inequalities between male and female.

In our law of inheritance, a discrimination apparently seems to be present in the distribution of property between a man and a woman but virtually this cannot be termed as 'discrimination' if we take into account other related factors.

In our society, father is responsible for catering to the basic needs of his minor sons and daughters, but mother has no such responsibility to bear. Wife can lawfully claim her subsistence and shelter from her husband, but husband cannot claim so from his wife. It is logical, therefore, that the sex that shoulders the liabilities of

the family should be provided with shares larger than that of the sex which does not shoulder so. Muslim Laws of Inheritance, we know, are based on the dictates of the Holy Quran, which is a blessing to the mankind irrespective of man and woman. We should not forget that it is the Holy Quran which virtually picked us women folk from the vilest position in the days of ignorance and has upgraded their status to that due for them. Learned Judge Ms Sultana should, therefore, refrain from speaking against the laws which have religious sanction.

M A Sobhan, Tikka Para, Mohammadpur Dhaka

Discovery of uranium in Sylhet

Sir, This refers to a news item published in your esteemed daily on June 5, regarding discovery of high grade uranium at Fultala, Moulvibazar in the greater Sylhet district. We congratulate the people of Sylhet in general and the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission in particular on the discovery of the valuable mineral. In fact, as far back as in the

year 1985 we heard about the discovery of uranium in Sylhet but nothing practical has been done as yet to exploit it.

It may also be recalled that as far back as in the year 1974 Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission set up a pilot plant in Cox's Bazar for the exploration, research and survey of valuable minerals zircon, rutile, elmenite, garnet, magnetite and monazite etc known as 'back-gold' but nothing pragmatic has been done so far for the utilisation of the minerals. In the meantime, millions of tons of valuable minerals have been lost and continue to be washed away by sea water and tidal bore year after year. It appears that there is no dearth of valuable minerals in our country but we are very much lacking in utilising those, for our carelessness. The beach minerals in the coastal areas, spread over from Teknaf to Kuakata and valued at billions of dollars, can be economically used by indigenous method, instead of being lost in the sea, but, it seems, Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission and our authorities concerned are still sitting idle.

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