

Enabling Environ for Poverty Reduction

The Indian Finance Minister Manmohan Singh has said on arrival in Dhaka that military spendings need to be cut in the region for speedy economic growth leading to poverty alleviation.

The adviser to Pakistan Prime Minister on Economic Affairs V A Zafarey had this to say on arrival: "mistrust and bilateral issues obstruct the process of cooperation" which otherwise could have ensured rapid economic growth in the region.

Between these two statements we have the crux of the poverty alleviation challenge confronting the SAARC. In fact they have gone to the heart of the matter and hit the nail right in the head when they linked mutual distrust and arms-building as the basic problems ruling out poverty alleviation.

It is principally India and Pakistan, the two big partners of SAARC, who owe the rest a responsibility to roll back their military expenditures which have assumed astronomical proportions in stark contrast to their respective poverty situations.

We believe that India and Pakistan have a leading role to play by setting examples of drastic squeezes on their military budgets.

Let's separate the facts from fiction and rhetorics from realities. We have allowed ourselves to be trapped in a vicious cycle — mistrust leading to greater military build-up and such build-up in turn spawning more distrust as the prime mover of an unending arm race.

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Indecent Fraud

One courageous national daily once made it into a campaign to denounce large newspaper advertisements offering quick and sure cure for all kinds of incurable afflictions — sometimes with guarantees.

A regular half-page advertisement in the highest circulated daily in the land, with unusually big type used in the text, guarantees a 100 per cent cure in a few days of a worst complicated and chronic disease whose name the heavenly healers always fail to spell correctly.

This much is a poor sampling of the fare offered and the language couching the promises is hardly translatable — from the pages of the parjika calendar books suddenly all porno material has made a glorious landing on the broad-sheet prestigious morning papers of the nation.

THE country is fast moving towards political disaster — hard earned democracy is at stake! What the political parties are fighting for? Election for going to or remaining in power? Why not leaving it to the people? They know what to do in the election. It's not far off. Street actions to advance it is fraught with danger.

Electoral rigging? Unfortunately as it is — this takes place in many countries around the world: it varies only in forms and degrees. Some do it in a subtle way and others blatantly. In any case, caretaker government alone cannot ensure free and fair election. It is the Election Authority — which is honest, independent and impartial — that can ensure free and fair election.

According to one Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) soldier, he can go months without smiling.

Nor does Rwanda's possible future president drink or smoke. His discipline and incorruptibility are legendary. As director of military intelligence in the National Resistance Army — the Uganda rebel movement which Yoweri Museveni led to power in Kampala — subordinates knew him as unforgiving: "No amount of money could save you," recalls an officer. For this he was nicknamed Pirato, or Pilate, after Pontius Pilate who sentenced Jesus Christ to death.

His period as intelligence director saw a record number of treason cases. Robbers caught red-handed were given even shorter shrift. It was common for a polythene bag to be placed over their head, causing death from suffocation.

Now, back in Rwanda, he has made strenuous efforts to maintain discipline in the rebel army, despite the intense desire for retaliation for the massacres organised by the government.

Political Disaster Ahead!

by Muslehuddin Ahmad

Here in Bangladesh, democracy stands established, people are sensible and fine — here we need only some political flexibilities. Political leaders must also understand that they are the leaders and can serve people whether they are in the government or in the opposition.

This is the opportune moment for the opposition to return to the House and debate the issues to make the Election Commission the strongest one which can really take charge of the present and future elections of the country.

people and, therefore, it is possible to constitute an impartial, strong and non-political Election Authority/Election Commission for conducting election in a free and fair manner.

Anyway, these ideas and views have already been reflected through newspaper columns and particularly through the very well-organised written dialogue chronicled by The Daily Star.

The main worry seems to be on who should head a government, caretaker or otherwise, during three months of election period. The fear is that the head of the government has the possibility of influencing the election. Once the Election Authority is made completely independent of administration there should be

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political parties represented in the present Parliament exactly in the same proportion of their present strength in the Parliament. Some representation of the important political parties which are at present not represented in the Parliament may be considered.

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'Commander Pilate' Swims in an Unfriendly Sea

Crespo Sebunya writes from Kampala

Outnumbered and outgunned, Rwandan rebels have put government forces on the defensive. Their success puts a spotlight on their commander, an austere, non-drinking, non-smoking disciplinarian with a burning zeal to bring justice to the country from which he was forced as a baby. Gemini News Service looks at the man who could be president.



Rwandan rebel leader Maj. Gen. Paul Kagame. Toothpaste is a luxury.

Rebel army, despite the intense desire for retaliation for the massacres organised by the government.

paste and regards it as a luxury," says a fellow officer, who points out that many RPF soldiers "fight tooth and nail to reach the trenches occupied by Rwandan government troops so they can enjoy bottles of beer and French corned beef."

As a young man, outraged by the injustice of the Milton Obote government, he left Makerere University to join Museveni's rebels.

When the invasion started, he was taking further military training in the United States. His three fellow officers died in the first week, and he took over the RPF reins.

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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.

Employment of deaf youths

Sir, I am a deaf young man. Having passed Class-V from Govt Deaf & Dumb School, Dhaka and also Class-VIII from a private education institution, I was subsequently trained as a skilled machine man in ERPH at Tongi. I had to receive my education through hardship but I am unemployed in spite of being extremely industrious.

Market segmentation for newspapers

Sir, Your recently published editorial comments on press freedom in Bangladesh drew my attention and I would like to add my opinion. You are absolutely right on the point that recent attack on the press is a heinous work and direct threat to freedom of speech.

Malibagh Bazar Road

Sir, After long waiting, the dug portion of Malibagh Bazar Road has been repaired a few weeks back. This road is in front of Mouchak Market, running from north of Maruf Market and connecting another road on the eastern side.

Ibrahim Danishmand

Sir, A religious scholar by the name of Hazrat Ibrahim Danishmand came to India from Damascus, where he had been a pupil under the great Sufi philosopher, Shaikh Shahabuddin Suhrawardy, in the early part of the 13th century AD.

Maga cities

Sir, For 6000 years or so the city has been the marketplace of ideas and art, the hub of commerce, the heart of civilization. Now a USA survey of world's 100 large urban areas (including Dhaka) warns that runaway growth may lead to unliveable cities in days to come.

Children's hospitals

Sir, In our country there are only a few children's hospitals. Even these few hospitals have many limitations to providing better treatment to the huge number of ailing children. Hence, it is greatly felt that the government provide the children's hospitals with necessary fund to raise the number of their medical staff as well as other facilities.

Our national news

Sir, When I go through page 9 of your esteemed newspaper, which you have allotted for our national news I feel very sad and disheartened. Most of the news items are depressing. Murders, dacoities, hijackings, suicides, accidents, diseases and natural calamities seem to have formed a retinue.

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