

Acid Test for Global Will

To use a borrowed phrase it was like "re-arranging deck chairs on the Titanic." The last ditch effort by the international community to save the situation in Bihar looked that way on Thursday. Giving two hoots to the UN-designated 'safe area' and 'no-fly zone' and the several retaliatory strikes by NATO, the Serb forces advanced within 500 metres of the Bihar city centre day before yesterday. By now it might well have fallen in Karadzic's hands, unless something miraculous has happened in-between to stop him on his tracks. The nightmare of Dantesque Inferno is conjured up within a 3-km pocket, where 1 lakh 80 thousand refugees, 1200-man Bangladeshi peacekeeping battalion and 15 UN civilians looked destined to be under siege — threatened to be overrun.

This total defiance of an international will, rather belatedly made up by a UN-NATO joint resolve, by a speck of a pariah has no parallel in contemporary history. A limited air strike, proportionate to the offence committed, actually meaning pot-marking an air-strip rather than wiping out the sophisticated infantry or missile capability of the Serbs, sounded like an empty cliché. Some pundits tried to justify the Serb putsch on the queer logic that it was provoked by the Bosnian advances which were but to recapture some lost territories.

The UN has come under fire, rightly we think, for allowing itself to be reduced into a position where it has to worry for its own peacekeepers. And NATO which, in this case, is a mandated enforcer of Security Council resolutions, is unfortunately obsessed with the safety of its aircrafts. So, it is the Serbs who have been calling the shots, dictating the sequence of events, and not the guardians of international order. And, we now come to a pass where the UNHCR has to brace itself for a new humanitarian exercise.

We are still keeping faith with the UN and NATO that they will not pass out in a whimper. We are hoping they have already made an effective air strike to roll back the final onslaught by the Serbs. If the Serbs have held themselves back from the pocket, of their own volition, to show some respect to a 'safe zone,' well and good. If they have not, then they must be persuaded to declare a cease-fire by diplomatic means, failing which they should be liable to a full-blooded military action. Finally, there has to be a heavy weapons exclusion zone around the area.

Banking at Risk

Questions swarm over Wednesday's broad-daylight bank dacoity at Farmgate. That the robbers here match their western countries' counterparts in dare-devilry has long been proved. In the past also did they waylay vehicles carrying fat sums of money from one bank to another or to an office for payment of cash salaries to employees. The Wednesday's raid is particularly galling because there were reportedly a number of security lapses.

Clearly, when the atmosphere is fraught with such dangers, the bank authority appears not to have learnt any lesson from similar incidents. In time of transfer of such big amounts, there is a need to be extra-cautious. The choice of a security van would be a wise decision. In this case reports are not conclusive if such a van was used. Most likely it was not. The other important point is that the money was being carried after the banking hours and no outsiders should normally come to know of this. What it refers to then is an in-house informer or a mole.

No wonder that such information leakages of money transactions from either end have caused tragedies in the past and currently lurks ominously to greatly undo the banking system. Even far smaller amounts have tempted the insiders to divulge secrets and as big an amount as Tk 18 lakh is sure to get volunteers for the job if of course they too are assured of a hefty share of the booty. A driver of the bank is absconding now. When apprehended he might be a ready clue to any such information leakage. Until then let us keep our fingers crossed.

The point however emerges that the gangsters also feel encouraged to commit the same crime by default of strong legal actions against them. In most cases the follow-up of police investigation is not made public. If the criminals, moles included, are pursued to the bitter end of their severe punishment, they might be less inclined to take the risk.

Food Habits Die Hard

Both nettle and beetle have not only a common sound between them but also share together a quality — a bad one at that — of irritation. If one is highly stinging member of the herb family, the other can be either of the countless insects of the order coleoptera. Not to confuse with Cleopatra. Man usually tends to avoid both because of the burning sensation they might cause through coming in contact with them. But how about an entire race showing preference for either of the avoidable?

An archaeological proof has just emerged to shed light on the food habits of the Europeans living in the Bronze Age. Archaeologist Mike Corbishley concludes that the pre-historic Europeans actually had nettle for their food. What is even more important is that the ingredients used in that hoary past are still available and make tasty dishes, so claims Corbishley. His experiment with nettle soup has surprisingly yielded encouraging results.

There is nothing to be surprised at the apparently weird diet of the Europeans' ancestors. For man is an omnivorous animal who is likely to easily beat the proverbial habit of goat. Even today man demonstrates a wider and queerer choice for diet. What is a special dish for somebody is in fact nauseating to others. The preferences vary not just in case of individuals but from nation to nation or race to race. Some delicious dishes cannot simply be relished by a vast community simply because of the religious sanctions. Snakes, rats, earth worms, cockroaches — a species of beetle — and dogs make good dishes for many in the East. Similarly, aphrodisiac qualities, as believed by a vast army of population, has put on high demands the flesh, trunks and bones of quite a number of animals. People in the West do eat oyster and octopus. Have we ever thought that the almost universal popular prawn is a water insect?

HOME Minister S B Chavan and state minister Rajesh Pilot are far from happy. They still cannot figure out why Prime Minister Narasimha Rao neither consulted, nor informed, them before taking away the department of Kashmir affairs from their ministry. Both came to know about the change on the night the President signed the notification. Some source at Rashtrapati Bhavan telephoned to tell them.

Why did PM do so is a matter of several conjectures. Was it because of Chavan's interview to the BBC in London that Pilot's views on Kashmir were his 'personal' and that he had nothing to do with the policy on Kashmir? Or, was it because of Pilot's stiff protest letter to the Prime Minister, alleging that 'the home minister's statement had done incalculable harm to our government's combined image at the international level'?

That Chavan and Pilot differed on Kashmir was known to PM. The first favoured the same old sterile policy that had yielded little in the last four decades. The other sought a more dynamic approach that emitted confidence and conciliation. But it was apparent that both suited PM. The government could blow hot and cold at the same time. Maybe, there was method in the madness. Although the policy looked contradictory, yet it touched many points that the militancy in Kashmir raised. Some top leaders in Delhi are privy to PM's admission that he wanted the confusion to prevail.

And it is now an established fact that Pilot had the backing of PM in whatever he did. Pilot says so in his letter: "Home

It's Chavan against Pilot

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Minister may not like the initiatives on my part, but you always encouraged me and told me that, being the prime minister and senior most leader of the party, I have your blessings and I must continue to take all these initiatives which are in the national interest and bring solution to long standing issues."

If it had been left to Chavan, he would not have allowed Pilot to join the home ministry in the first instance. He did not assign him any work for days even after his induction from Communications. The prime minister had to intervene to get him the charge of internal security. It is possible, as Pilot says in his letter, that "the home minister has perhaps not been able to reconcile to the same till date."

Indeed, some of the initiatives Pilot took could not be to the liking of Chavan. For example, the settlement of Bodo and the Jarkhand problems gave Pilot credit and recognition. PM congratulated him. Now that he has ditched him, it is being assumed that Pilot was going wrong on Kashmir. Still worse, PM has made no amends for what Chavan said in London and repeated at Delhi airport on return. Pilot says in the letter that "I do not mind to be belittled if it pleases the home minister, but certainly not when it belittles the national interest."

Time will prove that new

arrangements will not work because PM has demolished a buffer which he had in the shape of Pilot. He took risks, held public meetings in the border areas of the state and reached Kashmiri people to build up opinion — and support — against the militants. PM has neither time, nor the temperament to establish contacts on the ground. He has not even visited Kashmir after assuming office.

Then why has he taken more on his plate, which is al-

370 and independence. Whatever is in his mind, there is no evidence to indicate that he is willing to place his cards on the table. Probably as PM, he cannot and should not. But that makes the absence of a person like Pilot all the more glaring. He could shoot a line and still get away with it.

What one has heard of so far is that of a fresh poll in Jammu and Kashmir. The electorate is yet to be convinced that they should exercise their right to vote. That necessitates a polit-

reputation which is hard to live down. He is PM's blind spot and since the governor's panacea for the ills of Kashmir is the election, PM has gone along.

His hold on PM must be immense because he has been retained despite a petition against him by Kashmiri leaders. Farooq Abdullah of National Conference, G R Kar of Congress, and M Yousuf Tarigami of CPI(M). They have pleaded for the governor's removal in order to take "a bold initiative, both political and administrative."

Obviously, PM has taken a fancy to the governor's totalitarian methods, which have only taken Kashmir further from the country. He is the one who messed up the Hazratnagar incident by posting the army around the shrine. He does not know what conciliation means. Chavan was able to curb him a bit. He did not even entertain the telephone calls of Pilot. Directly under PM, who is engrossed in other political problems, the governor will rule unchecked and continue to aggravate the Kashmir problem.

New arrangements have made no difference on the policy, thinking or handling of the problem. Bulky files go across the street, from home ministry in the North Block to the prime minister's office in the South Block. All officials dealing with Kashmir are the same

and they have had no new instructions so far. All that they do now is to mark the files to the prime minister instead of routing them through Chavan and Pilot.

Taking away Kashmir from home ministry was bad enough; it builds up unnecessary hopes here and abroad. Leaving Chavan and Pilot in the same ministry will be worse. Pilot is already smarting under humiliation and Chavan is not sorry for what he has said. The ministry is tense, a divided camp. The functioning has become more bureaucratic.

The home ministry is a focal point of domestic affairs. The ministry has to gear up the functioning, including greater coordination between the Intelligence Bureau and district/state administration, inculcating accountability in the police and para-military forces; coordinating operations between the neighbouring state; improving coastal patrolling and close monitoring of security situation in the north-eastern states. How is this possible?

Walls between Chavan and Pilot are going up every day. The estrangement between the two is more than before. Kashmir was taken from the home ministry. PM cannot sort out problems every day. Even if the two ministers had the best of relationship, they could not have solved the problems that face the country. Something more than teamwork is required. The distance between the two is affecting the ministry adversely. One of them has to be transferred to some other portfolio. Otherwise, the two will continue to fight as cats. The confusion will be more confounded. Maybe, that is what PM wants.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

ready full? True, his appetite is unlimited and one can see it from the array of portfolios he has. When Shared Pawar went to Maharashtra to be its chief minister, PM did tinker with the idea of moving Chavan to defence and deputy chairman of Planning Commission Pranab Mukherjee to home. But he loves power and subsequently persuaded himself to retain defence; Kashmir, however, is a different cup of tea.

His direct charge can be of some purpose if he has formulated firm ideas on Kashmir. Once he said that the sky is the limit. Subsequently, he talked about a special status, something between Article

ical dialogue. Pilot would have come in handy, if PM still insists on holding the polls, it would mean that he wants to perpetuate the farce that the governance in Kashmir is. No political party has welcomed elections and one of his own cabinet ministers, Ghulam Nabi Azad, who hails from Kashmir, has openly opposed them. Even chief election commissioner has said that time is not yet ripe for the polls.

One has a nagging feeling that PM has no policy of his own. He is guided by Jammu and Kashmir governor Krishna Rao, a person who has left behind, as Nagaland governor, a

Of Politics and Economics : The Case of Priority

by Dr Kabir U Ahmad

Establishing the priority of politics over economics in the overall decision making context is not enough to promote the steady development of a society. If one looks at the contemporary scene of socio-political and economic development processes of the newly emerging countries, one needs to reckon the ethical dimension to it as well.

National priority scale of various fields therefore is of critical importance.

Various Approaches to Political Economy

The question of whether politics is above economics or vice-versa belongs to the field of political economy. If one thinks of establishing such a hierarchy or ordering of the importance of various disciplines for societal development, one is reminded of various schools among social and political philosophers. Some would claim that economics plays such a critical role in the life of individuals and the society that economics should be placed on top of everything else. Economics, according to them, governs or determines politics and society. From this follows that if an efficient or fast growing economic system can be put in place, then everything else in the society will be taken care of, or all other aspects of the society will develop smoothly without much hindrance. This kind of view has descended from the classical political economy and has been very influential. But there are others (including a famous Muslim thinker like Ibn Khaldun) who would emphasize the establishment of power and politics being the most important one. Political power, according to them, occupies the top position in the hierarchy of importance and everything else follows from it. Further, in recent years, some economic theorists (William Nordhaus's 1975 paper in 'The

Review of Economic Studies' can be treated as the starting point) have been developing the idea of Political Business Cycle which says that politicians in democracies have the incentives and power to manipulate economic resource allocations before election so as to win popular votes and thereby create inflation before election which need to be controlled after the election by adopting deflationary measures. Politicians in democracies, therefore, can and have created, according to some evidence, business cycles which can exacerbate the normal business cycles that take place in the economy. This view emphasizes the power of politics on top of everything else. Also from a practical point of view, all major decisions affecting the society as a whole are taken at the political level in every society. All these seem to suggest a revival of the old Aristotelian position that economics is in the domain of politics but politics is not in the domain of economics. In other words, politics is prior to economics.

However, establishing the priority of politics over economics in the overall decision making context is not enough to promote the steady development of a society. If one looks at the contemporary scene of socio-political and economic development processes of the newly emerging countries, one needs to reckon

the ethical dimension to it as well. Politics certainly occupies the dominant position while the other disciplines are ranked somewhat below it, but the principle of justice or fairness seems to be crucial in explaining the political upheavals that are characterising the contemporary scene.

Some examples would illustrate this point. Since the Second World War, many newly independent, resource-rich and fast-growing countries like Iran, Nigeria, Ghana, the Philippines and Pakistan, to mention only a few, have gone through political upheavals and have not been able to reach their pre-upheaval growth rates again or have reached them after a long lapse of time. The list can be increased further by including the recent dismantling of what was once considered to be the second superpower, USSR. Its dismemberment has given birth to a number of third world like economies in central Asia. These examples drive home the main thrust of the line of argument of this short paper.

Politics with Justice or Fairness

As far as economic development was concerned, these countries were doing very well with 5% — 7% growth rate per year without much difficulty. In spite of such growth performances, these countries had gone through political disasters simply because their politics was wrong. The rulers of these countries were not giving fair deals to their citizens. It was true with the Soviet Union as well. However, in the language of Aristotle,

one could see in these countries a combination of oligarchy, monarchy and tyranny. Economic well-being, therefore, is no guarantee for a smooth and peaceful development of the society if politics at the top is seen to be unfair and unjust by the citizens. Justice and fairness in politics seem to be playing a critical role in the steady development of many societies.

The case of Pakistan reminds everyone in Bangladesh very painfully how autocratic the successive regimes were. Pakistan was supposed to be the 'Land of the Pure' with 'equality and Islamic justice' for all citizens. Expecting 'justice' from the rulers of Pakistan was like having a day dream. The ruling oligarchy could not trust the ordinary citizens with their free rights to vote which enshrines the simple principle of political fairness and justice. Even if they allowed it sometime, they did not implement its verdict. The consequence has been the destruction of the political framework through untold human sufferings in the former eastern wing of Pakistan which is now Bangladesh.

The case of Iran is equally illustrative. The country is richly endowed with natural resources, educated manpower and cultural tradition. The economy was growing rapidly, but it was the tyranny of the Shah that led to the political upheaval. The development process has slowed down considerably since the overthrow of the Shah in 1979.

Some Concluding Observations

The lessons from all these examples is that for a peaceful and steady development of a society with any sense of decency, the politics of the country's leaders has to be unmanipulated, fair and clean. The only way to assure such clean and fair politics is to take people into confidence and empower them with free choice and rights to vote on a one-man one-vote basis without any manipulations and accept their judgments at the polls with humility and magnanimity. Any arbitrary manipulation with this process is a sure recipe for social disaster. What is, however, equally significant here is that the fast rate of economic growth alone does not guarantee the stability of the society in which one wants to live in peace and security. To put it differently, even a fast rate of economic growth cannot protect the society from disasters if the politics of the leaders is not fair and clean.

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.

Keep them out of the hartal

Sir, I fully agree with the view of The Daily Star's editorial of November 12, that reads "...the participation in strikes is no longer voluntary but coerced." The rickshaw and van pullers and day-labourers and small shop-owners of our country can get one meal only against one shift work. They, in fact, do not willingly cease to work. For if they don't work, they must starve. During the period of strike they are forced or coerced to abstain from earning their daily meal.

Demand, movement, siege, strike, hartal etc, will remain till crisis exists in our society. I think that the strike-callers should keep the rickshaw and van pullers, poor day-labourers and small shop-owners out of the purview.

Kamrul Islam
Sirajganj

"Varendra" ...

Sir, The correspondence on "Varendra: Our First Museum", in your letter columns

reached an interesting stage. My letter was published rather late (on 7.10.94) pointing out the lack of due courtesy on the part of Hosne Ara Motahar for not acknowledging in anyway the indebtedness to late Mokhesur Rahman for her article published on 24.6.94.

Now Mrs Motahar asserted (on 15.10.94) that she had "absolutely no previous knowledge of such an article" written by Mokhesur Rahman in the "Varendra Research Museum Journal". She further wrote that after reading the letter in question she "had to borrow it from acquaintance and read it." How can she read it when I did not refer to any article of Mokhesur Rahman published in the Varendra Research Museum Journal? In fact, no such detailed story about the inception of the Varendra Research Museum was ever published in any of the seven volumes of Varendra Research Museum Journal printed till today. The article of Mokhesur Rahman referred to by me was published in the Institute of Bangladesh Studies Rajshahi Seminar Volume 2 regarding which Hosne Ara

Motahar remained silent.

The late Mokhesur Rahman, who was the Curator of Varendra Research Museum for a long time, wrote the history of the museum on more than one occasion. If we allow Motahar's claim that both she and Mokhesur Rahman "may have used the same primary sources," then she still has to explain the extraordinary similarities of so many sentences, mode of expressions and style of composition between her article and several articles of Mokhesur Rahman written long ago, only one of which had been named by me. Even in her aggrieved rejoinder, she did not specifically mention her own sources for the said article to dispel any ill-conceived doubt. In a civilised society, indebtedness to previous writers does not adversely affect an author's scholarly ability or innate dignity.

Shamima Ahmed
Rampura, Dhaka

Ailing northern districts

Sir, The news and photo published in The Daily Star on November 18 bring into focus once more the famine like condition in the northern districts.

For the last four years in a row, the grim poverty situation in the greater Rangpur district has come into the media, time and again depicting jobless-

ness, hunger and also extensive river erosion, bringing further calamities to the distressed communities.

This year's river erosion has been so extensive, that even the once prosperous farmers of Lalmonirhat have been reduced to penury. In the greater Rangpur district, and in Panchagarh and Bogra, 80% of the rural people are marginal farmers of landless labourers. This year's failure of the man crop means no jobs for the landless rural people, adding a grimmer picture in the hunger situation. The government is trying to meet the situation by occasional doles which is generally considered as an insult to the human dignity.

The government has to be anxious and effortful to meet the situation squarely. This is only possible when the government recognises the fact that the poverty situation in the northern districts is worse than in other parts of the country. If this fact is accepted, then it becomes incumbent on the government to take medium and long term measures for the creation of jobs in the northern districts.

The infrastructure facilities, and power generation in the northern districts is poor, and need immediate rectification, so that the setting up of small scale and agro-based industries are made possible. The development of the infrastructural facilities itself will provide adequate job opportunities, for

many years to come. A recent report states that the BSIC Industrial Estate at Lalmonirhat is riddled with corruption and administrative failures. Such things need early probe and rectification. The northern districts are not blessed with the supply of gas, but this should not deprive them of adequate power supply (diesel) till such time when coal is made available from Barapukuria.

In the Fifth Five Year Plan provision is required to be made, for the northern districts, in all the areas of development, namely road building, power generation, large scale industries where feasible, small and agro-based industries, irrigation facilities and prevention of soil erosion, extension of educational facilities, including technical education, et al.

We would urge the government to kindly examine and tackle the above mentioned issues on a priority basis.

Shahabuddin Mahtab
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Altitude of wedding

Sir, An Indian couple got married aboard a plane airborne recently can be a trend setter and is very likely to be a Guinness Book material, as never before had a wedding taken place at such an altitude.

Where the couple solemnised their vows may not make

a hell of difference" to the humanity, but the mode of legitimising their relationship can have a bearing upon too many old, new, and to be conjugal partners psychologically and even societally.

Evidently enough, the affordability of super rich wedding — Maharajah style — will always remain a dream for the overwhelming majority bachelors who aspire for a pompously wedlocked life.

Matrimonies in all faiths, in modern and primitive fashions, have always been meant for a heterosexual private relationship. Now that tradition has already changed..... the orthodox attitude is faced with the rapid transformation of social norms — save the odd couples as well as single lifestyle otherwise.

A novel act leads to another novel thought and vice versa, and that is how many inventions and advances came about ever since the "evolution of human life".

Up in space or down beneath sea, the inter-personal relations can grow above and beyond celestial complexities only to be strictly mutual.

A society and also the rest of the mankind find oftentimes a wide variety of lessons to learn from a long married happy couple that delivers how a marriage can work for a better world to live in.

M Rahman
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