

## Forest Policy

On Thursday the country got a new forest policy. On the face of it, it looks comprehensive enough, touching on many of the endemic problems facing the forest sector. Under a 20-year master plan for afforestation, the country can really improve its records on this basic element of physical environment. It is an ambitious goal the policy has set for accomplishing. It seeks to bring 20 per cent of the country's land area under forest cover — both private and public — by the year 2015. Even more importantly, half of the forest land will be set aside for conservation.

The accomplishment of such a challenging goal over a period of 20 years means that the process will have to reach its culmination through an unrelenting fulfilment of yearly, maybe, three-yearly or five-yearly targets fixed in advance. There is no short-cut in the task of growing trees or developing forest lands. The implication is that the country will have to conserve more forest areas as it grows more of these. Forest cover constitutes no more than eight to nine per cent of the country's land area, and yet the forest department has great difficulty conserving much of it.

Conservation alone will be a daunting task with so much of forest land. Now add to this the rapid growth of population. Currently, two-thirds of the country's total land area are under cultivation while the remainder is used up by roads, railways, human abodes and forests. Currently, the per head availability of land is only one-fifth of an acre. By the year 2015, the population is expected to more than double. More land will be needed as living spaces for such a huge population. So the natural question is, where will the land come from to undertake such a massive afforestation programme?

Well, the accreted coastal lands, fallow areas and denuded hills can be obtained for the purpose but the gains could be substantially offset by the increasing demand for residential land. But even from such a desperate situation we can do enough to expand the tree cover by maximising the use of whatever spare land we have, if the plan is intensively, methodically and meticulously implemented.

Different Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) have proved that the future of any afforestation programme lies in the hands of the poor. Their active participation through benefit-sharing has proved to be a success. The government seems to have taken a cue from the NGOs. Let the poor benefit from social forestry which has a great potential to secure the environmental future for the nation.

## Power Shortage

Energy Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain has placed all the cards on the table about the dilemma in the power sector. What little he seems to have kept close to his chest however falls on us to say with a bit of professional responsibility. He said at a seminar on Power Sector Reform and its Effect in National Economy two days back that an additional 2300 megawatt would have to be generated at an astronomical cost of Tk 7,300 crore to level off with the accumulated demand of electricity in 2000 AD. Our present generation capacity is 1900 megawatt.

The long-term demand projection is apparently based on the current rate of suppressed demand, a demand that is going unmet in terms of individual craving and perhaps with an eye to the requirement of the service and industrial sectors. Should there be a flaw in the demand assessment we shall be without one of the basic tools for economic take-off which is strongly predicted to happen by 2000 AD, of course, other things remaining the same. Our per capita consumption of electricity being the lowest in the region — 83 kilowatt per hour — way behind even the second lowest Sri Lanka's 196 kilowatt, the concept of 'suppressed demand' needs to be extended to include the whole range of potential economic demand for the next six years.

While the system loss must be plugged for its own sake, the money we can save from this area does look like a peanut before the Tk 7,300 crore investment we need to meet our demand for electrical power till 2000 AD. A ten per cent drop in the system loss is going to save us Tk 160 crore per year. At this rate, given the present total figure of system loss at 34.82 per cent we shall be saving at the most Tk 760 crore by completely stopping it. Since some percentage of loss is unavoidable, even that sum cannot be scraped.

The answers therefore lie in associating the private sector with the task as a commercial proposition and developing the alternative sources of energy, such as, bio-gas and solar power. Let's also start the process of involving India and Nepal in some regional hydel power projects.

## Somalian Quicksand

President Clinton has sent his troops to Somalia again. The US mission, this time around, is to ensure a safe demobilisation of the UN peace-keeping troops from Somalia by March next year. Both in terms of the coming and going of troops and the prevailing situation in that country the vision that is conjured up is one of going back to square one in Somalia, if not worse.

When as many as 30 US soldiers died in a hateful vendetta, an earlier US mission in Somalia was wrapped up in the face of a tremendous pressure of public opinion in the USA. The US commanders left the unfinished job to the UN peace-keeping force which gained in troops strength subsequently to make for a presence of 15,000 men on the ground. Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani and Egyptian contingents are in it. The US leadership is now doing a good turn to the UN force and the national contingents in it by deciding to be by their side on the front-line of action in Somalia.

By the very admission of the UN representative in Somalia, the country is in the throes of a bloody civil war. The point is the UN peace-keepers go to a trouble-spot not to fight but to keep peace. Maintenance of law and order and implementation of a political agenda for local reconciliation must go hand in hand in a UN peace-keeping operation. Was the mandate adequate for a synchronisation of the two roles in Somalia? The Bosnian retreat, and now the Somali tangle, should help us devise ways and means to ensure completion of UN peace-keeping missions. Retreat does not get a good name for the world body.

In certain quarters there is some confusion about what foreign policy is all about. To them, it is still concerned with arms race, ideological rivalry, a policy of confrontation and conflict for gaining foreign territory resources or sheer supremacy over rival nations. Dictators, military juntas or even small ruling elites are seen as the main actors in the play. Their aim is to promote selfish and narrowly conceived group or partisan interest oblivious of the welfare or the views of the commonman. Intrigues, betrayals playing one side against the other under cover of complete secrecy are believed to be the tools used in the drama.

This no doubt is an utterly distorted idea about the objectives as well as the operational methods of diplomacy. It is true that at certain times and in some countries things used to be that way. But we have moved a long way from that position. Many factors have contributed to this change.

The emergence of the subjugated nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America to independence after the Second World War, spread of democracy and education, spectacular improvements in the means of communications may be men-

# Evolving Foreign Policy Perspectives

by Abul Ahsan

**There is no denying the validity of the old adage that foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy. President Clinton once said that the United States must be strong domestically if it wanted to be strong globally... For a country like Bangladesh the precept is equally or even more true.**

## Competing Foreign Policy Agenda

The most dramatic impact on foreign policy perceptions however has come about from the recent changes in the global political and security parameters. These changes are symbolized by the drastic erosion of communism as a competing ideology, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Socialist states of Eastern Europe and the increasing role being played by the United Nations in matters related to security, war and peace. As a consequence conflict, tension and situations arising out of arms race and continuously escalating expenditures on defence and newer and more deadly means of death and destruction have been contained and even reversed. The unique position that nation states have so far enjoyed, both as the main subject and the objects of international relations, are be-

ing challenged by the increasing way that the multinational corporations are holding in economic and industrial matters. Almost everywhere the emergence of the reality of global market place for the production, distribution and exchange of goods and services as well as the so-called international financial revolution makes all the difference.

The unprecedented rise in world population which continues unabated and is mostly confined to poor societies, the threat of large scale international migration because of ethnic and religious conflicts and the economic and ecological crises in many parts of the world are engaging the attention of both regional and world leaders. The questions of terrorism and the drugs are now subject matters of debates and discussions in SAARC and other forums. Military threats and the arms race are gradually being replaced by eco-

nomie rivalries, technology races and various forms of commercial warfare among nations, some of which have been close cold war friends and allies. Questions of democracy, human rights, empowerment of the poor and the environment, which have long been considered the exclusive preserves of states are now on the global agenda. There is growing realisation that no stable peace and durable international arrangements are possible without addressing these problems.

## New Thrusts and Emerging Priorities

But the objectives of the foreign policy still remain the same as they must i.e. to protect and promote national interests and values. The latter include safeguarding the security and independence of the country and upholding its economic, social and cultural interests.

But the changes that re-

ferred to earlier imply new thrusts and added dimensions to the existing concept or foreign policy. There must be a renewed emphasis on trade, investment, transfer of technology and cooperation among nations in educational and scientific fields. The improvement of socio-economic conditions of the masses are increasingly being seen as priority objectives of foreign policy.

Secondly, with the reduction in global tension and the increasing use of the United Nations for conflict resolution there is a visible tendency to down-play the security and strategic aspects of foreign policy. Countries whose military, economic and technological power base are narrow and whose ability to project those limited powers outside the borders is marginal or non-existent are advised to operate through like-minded countries or regional and multilateral organisations. The need for them

to chalk out a limited and well-focused foreign policy agenda cannot be over emphasised.

Finally there is no denying the validity of the old adage that foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy. President Clinton once said that the United States must be strong domestically if it wanted to be strong globally. He said this by way of justifying a shift away from US foreign involvement, a cold war legacy to the new situation confronting his country which was in a condition of relative decline — economically. For a country like Bangladesh the precept is equally or even more true. One cannot represent or promote that one does not have. Our journey to an effective foreign policy must begin at home. Consequently, with streamlining our missions abroad we must have strong and stable democratic institutions, a national consensus on basic security and foreign policy issues, an educated and skilled manpower base and a vibrant and broad-based economy at home. Much of what we hope to gain from our foreign policy involvements abroad will then be close to realisation.

The author is a former Foreign Secretary. He also served as the first SAARC Secretary-General.

# The Spirit of Liberation War Still Awaits a Spark

by Muhammad Qamrul Islam

orators took part in this movement.

Immediately after the day of victory on the 16th December, 1971, Government of Bangladesh was to resurrect a ravaged land; and undertake post-war reconstruction, relief and rehabilitation; install an administration to run the affairs of the sovereign state. Sheikh Mujib returned to his homeland, after his release from Pakistan jail on 10 January, 1972 and addressed the largest ever rally held in Bangladesh. He assumed the office of Prime Minister on 11 January 1972. At his call the Indian Army, who supported our liberation forces, left Bangladesh within twelve weeks of the victory. He called upon all to build a golden Bangla. Bangladesh continued to receive recognition from governments of other countries to its independence.

overnight. The lower and middle class people were growing under poverty and deprivation as before.

The historic language movement culminating in February 21, 1952 united the people against the ruling Muslim League Government. In the general election of 1954, Muslim League was ignominiously defeated and Jukta Front won 223 seats out of 237 Muslim seats. But, Jukta Front council of ministers were dissolved by applying Section 92 (A), when they were in power for only one month 26 days. In 1957, the mass leader Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani virtually hinted a good-bye to Pakistan during the Karghari conference. With the declaration of 6-point demand in 1966 by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the country entered into a new phase of movement towards freedom. The burning passion for independence imbued people to

reacruacy to foil the pro-people initiatives of Sheikh Mujib. He was helpless! The line of degeneration continued.

Even then, Sheikh Mujib advanced with the support of political leaders, government officers and staff, who were committed to the cause of liberation and the people, at large, towards a second revolution. But on the dreadful 15th of August, 1975 Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed at his residence along with his family members. Khondokar Mostaque being a member of his cabinet betrayed him. He proclaimed the Indemnity Ordinance to protect the killers of Sheikh Mujib. General Ziaur Rahman incorporated this black law into the constitution through Fifth Amendment. The line of degeneration which started earlier, got rather institutionalised afterward. After the August tragedy, 19

ment was introduced.

To protest the appointment of Golam Azam the infamous collaborator, as Amir of Jamaat-e-Islami and to demand his trial, a committee for the elimination of killers and collaborators were formed on January 19, 1992, with the late Jahannara Imam as its Convener.

BNP government is on the way to complete its four years in power. Meanwhile, serious political crisis has arisen centering the issue of a caretaker government for holding free and fair elections, as demanded by mainstream opposition parties. Commonwealth brokered dialogue to end the stalemate has failed, but the issue is there between the government and opposition parties. We are looking towards 27th December, 1994, as to how the government meets the Opposition. We only wish a settlement to come out.

Taiwan. We see Vietnam and Cambodia now taking the road to quick progress. All are being rated as high performing Asian economies. And where are we now? Say, in employment, industry, education, power and gas, water, forestry, fisheries, health or any other sector? Everywhere there are dismal statistics. Systems loss, campus violence, rampant corruption and deteriorating law and order situation etc. More than 90 per cent of the population is suffering agony. Perhaps only one per cent, the ruling elites and the beneficiaries of the past regimes, may be deriving whatever ecstasy there is by keeping politics, administration and economy of the country in their hitherto firm grip.

Bangladesh is at the bottom of even SAARC countries, having a trade deficit also with Bhutan! Let the Planning Commission, Bangladesh Institute of Administration and Management (who have incorporated moral values as an element of training) and Ministry of Establishment find a way to obviate the impasse. In this connection, emergence of NGOs run on foreign donations, from 1976, and their gradual expansion till now deserve attention of all concerned. The huge NGO community also could make little impact raising the low per capita income!

To sum up, Bangladesh has reached this staggering situation due to apparent or implied obstruction to implementation of the spirit of liberation over the last couple of decades in economic development, social and political progress. But the people are always ready to sacrifice for envisaged emancipation. And that's the spirit still forming in their heart even after the lapse of 23 years. The freedom fighters and their children, the new generation, will, no doubt, be able to eliminate the enemies opposing development and respectable place for Bangladesh in the comity of nations. That positive attitude is gaining ground hopefully.

## OPINION

### Political Adventurism

A Husnain

With the failure of the Commonwealth-Ninian mission (don't get between the blades of a pair of scissors, or between two Bengalees), we the citizens can give vent to our frustration at the black shades (yes, we are capable of producing shades of black) of the local style of political adventurism dogging the nation for decades, starting with the division of the Raj, and then the sub-division of truncated erstwhile Pakistan; and now seeping into the entrails of separate divisions and districtism. When the very self will be divided — the earthworm can reproduce itself!

What more quibant the so-called political leaders now expect from the bonded and bottomless citizens to fuel their bottomless ambitions? We had served them faithfully and facelessly for more than one generation. As a trade leader pointed out, the country has not been mortgaged to the politicians. It is time to come down from the pedestal.

The likes of Robert Bruce may not be found in the tropical rice fields of Sonar Bangla, but the seven attempts (anybody keeping count?) will be watched with tired and boring interest. The genuine politicians have never been accused of political coups (as distinct from the military coup of the junta). What we are witnessing today appears to be a new kind of political blackmail. Head you lose, and tail

I win, according to one of the political commentators.

Circumstances may soon point towards a clear option: if the politicians cannot run the country, then some others will have to run it, as the nation will remain, and ever-changing stewards will be called upon to serve the motherland. We all know the time-honoured proverb that three Bengalees cannot run a company. The latest off spring of the amendment suggests that two politicians are quite capable of forming two parties.

Politics has attraction for the deprived, but will the future image remain honourable? In the developed countries, politics has to compete with many other attractive careers and professions. There, the standard of living being comfortable, the politicians are not so much in the limelight as in the land of the unemployed. This spotlight will start swinging away from the netas when the crowd can earn some money working than following a procession to nowhere. There are more netas than followers!

The hartal and disruptive calls will strike back at the perpetrators. Hatred campaigns have never paid handsome dividends for long. The division between benevolence and malice will be revealed soon enough. When obsession turns into mania, it is time to watch out for the monomaniacs.

## 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.

### Rulings over court rulings

Sir, On 2nd December, around 10:30am, while I was passing by Shingthola under Sutrapur thana in old Dhaka, I got curious to notice a group of 25/30 young people entering a house in a mood that suggested of something serious.

So, I stood by and chose a small group of three persons idly looking on to enquire about.

Having failed to establish his claims, the party had again

and again sought help of the outsiders including the Ward Commissioner and Mohallah Committee as well as some goons having criminal background to pressurise the owner of the house to give in outside the court in shalishis. He reportedly had resorted to filing false criminal cases such as snatchings of gold ornaments by the landlord's sons and daughters, severe beatings and causing grievous injuries supported by false medical certificates by the landlord himself. However, by the grace of Allah and some honest police officials, as it is said, the innocents were acquitted of the fabricated charges.

These youngmen had come to force the landlord of the house to allow some modification in the dwelling of the illegal and forceful occupant against the court's ruling rejecting the request to allow (and forbidding) repairing, modification, alteration of the dwelling.

The opinion of the youngmen was that despite the

court's rulings, the Mohallah Committee had got the authority to give directives to do otherwise, if they considered it to be good.

It is further revealed that there were many good people living in the Mohallah and they felt that the court's ruling should be upheld as the case had been filed and the delatary tactics being resorted to by the claiming party. One should not approach the Ward Commissioner or the Mohallah Committee after failing to get court's verdict in one's favour.

The Ward Commissioners also should not entertain such wrongful requests. The problem is that the good, knowledgeable and sincere people never take interest in such issues in fear of harassments by the goons as well as the influential vis-a-vis the police inaction.

Can the government, particularly the Mayor take steps to curb interference of the so-called peace-keeping Mohallah Committees, the Commissioners in property matters already pending in the court and save the commonmen from harassments? Court's rulings should not be violated by force and the violators should be given exemplary punishments.

This is, I am sure, one of

many such incidences. Is there anybody in this country to look into this sort of increasing unjust extortions and save the sufferers?

An onlooker

### 'Alternatives to hartal'

Sir, Your article 'We Must Find Alternatives to Hartal' which was published on December 6, 1994 is thorough and could be an eye-opener for the opposition leaders. It must be the view of every peace-loving citizen of our country.

The opposition political parties' indifference to people's woes and how the country is affected by their movements, is astounding. It seems as if they had shut themselves within glass walls and by their extreme actions the distance between them and general public is increasing day by day. Most people do not like this mode of agitation as it is disrupting normal life.

People are losing patience fast. So, caretaker government or not, in the next general election the Opposition's chances of winning is also diminishing. Because ultimately it is the peoples' verdict they will have to seek.

Nur Jahan  
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