Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Sunday, March 19, 1995

## **Problem with Plenitude**

In a country known for its endemic want of daily necessities, it is hard to believe that a produce can ever become a problem not because of its scarcity but for its plentifulness. Some of the agricultural products have occasionally formed into a glut in some pockets suitable for the cultivation of those items. Now we come across a different variety of this apparent — not in absolute terms — surplus. Yesterday's screaming headline on the potato growers' woes in this newspaper's front page brings to the fore one home truth. Which is that we are quite adept in turning our advantages to our misfortune.

The fact that Munshiganj is no hinterland did not deter us to let go the economic opportunity the farmers thoroughly deserved. A bumper crop of potato, instead of becoming rewarding for the growers, has turned out to be mercilessly punishing. The farmers are getting a price for their produce far below their production cost — Tk 100 as against Tk 140 per 40kg. So acute is the problem that the growers do not know what to do with their produce. Buyers are hard to find. Nor are there enough storage facilities. The 50 cold storages have a total storing capacity of 55,000

The problem stems from a combination of the government's policy failures and market manipulations by the traders. Potato still sells at Tk 5 a kilogram in Dhaka market. If the growers are having to sell it at Tk 2.5 a kg in Munshiganj, the price in Dhaka market is definitely unreasonably high. Munshiganj is very close to Dhaka. And then Dhaka should not necessarily be the only market for this popular produce — one that can, in desperation, be eaten as an alternative to rice.

Production and marketing are interlinked. In our case the government continues to give sermons to our farmers for producing more. But it never considers it as a duty to coordinate things — and even at times help the farmers — between the point of production and that of the marketing. Production is meant for consumption and the prices should not unreasonably vary between different parts of the same country and at different times of the year. Gluts of certain crops at times, rendering them uneconomic for the farmers, are acting as a serious disincentive. The traders and middlemen have made their fortunes at the cost of the poor peasants' suffering. This has to be brought to an end. And that needs policy formulation and coordination both at the growing and marketing levels.

### **Academic Jams**

The vagaries of national politics, coupled with the students' own variety of armed slanging matches, are said to be putting to nought the various university authorities' bid to clear the backlog of academic sessions. A fresh beginning with a new session is becoming increasingly difficult.

This is despite the fact that Dhaka University has exemplarily prepared an academic calender setting the examination dates firmly rather than leaving this to future meetings of the syndicate and the caprice of the campus mood. The carryover system has been done away with in preference to a 'referred' system which basically requires completion of courses and taking of examinations on due dates. The number of times one used to be allowed to take the exams has also been reduced to the compulsory 'one time' appearance. Other universities have also geared them up institutionally to try and cope with the sessions glut. However, all of their chances of making any significant difference in the situation are marred by embittered politics in and out of the campus. Common sense says that one or two days' hartal and siege programmes cannot turn the academic sessions topsy-turvy. But if these should occur frequently and fall into a pattern there is obviously no telling how much they can hole up the university routines beyond repair.

That is no doubt one aspect of the problem but its another highly injurious element happens to be a particular student front's terrorisation of the campuses, as in Rajshahi and Chittagong universities. These have become dens for arms acquisition and their brazen displays. It is the gun-running at the universities that lead to their closures sine die which evidently constitute the more basic cause for sessions jam than what the occasional hartals have done to disrupt the academic life.

It is necessary therefore to comprehend afresh the connection between the conduct of the major political parties and that of their student fronts. The national political leaders should make an open and accountable declaration of intent to use their influence to disarm their protege student political parties. Then it should be for the university authorities and the student leaders to prove true to their earlier commitments to keep peace on the campus.

## Why the Embargo?

While the UN Security Council has renewed the crippling four and a half year-old ban on Iraqi oil sales and the US tries to ensure it in cooperation with the Gulf monarchies, the oil embargo has practically lost touch with the ground reality. It exists on paper.

In addition to the loosely maintained surveillance on the international waters, the US is now for maritime inspection in the Gulf as a concentrated measure to keep the embargo going. On available information, the neighbouring countries of Iraq are trading with her through land routes. Notably, the Turkish vehicles have been crossing into Iraq with sugar and flour and returning with

tanks full of diesel.

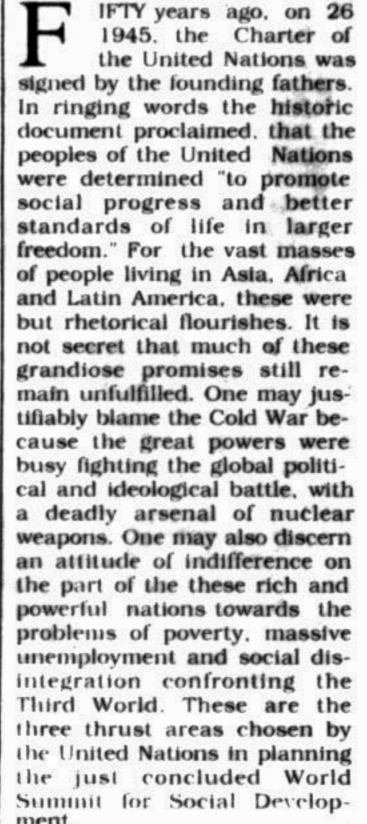
Furthermore, lured by the oil wealth of Iraq, the second largest reserve in the world, after that of Saudi Arabia, and inspired by its super-abundance — selling in Iraq at a fraction of even the price of drinking water there -, twenty western firms have reached tentative supply agreements with Iraq. What used to be discreet contacts have now become an openly competitive scramble for the hydrocarbon.

So crippling has been the impact of the economic sanctions on Iraq that one has to spend a week's salary to buy a dozen of eggs. The objective behind the embargoes could not have been to punish the people of Iraq, although it was surely intended to 'chasten' the leadership in Baghdad. Given the ordeal Iraq has been through, and in deference to the humanitarian concern raised by their plight, the sanctions have lost the moral ground to be continued. There must be ways to ease the economic embargo on Iraq.

# WSSD: A Shifting of Priorities

by Shah A M S Kibria

**ON THE RECORD** 



The end of the Cold War has made it possible for the UN to refocus attention on the pressing issues of global concern including the economic and social problems of the poor nations. It is significant that the UN organised as many as six world conferences during the past three years. One is, of course, justified in raising the question of benefits from such mammoth gatherings. One may argue that the UN General Assembly as well as the specialised agencies -ILO. FAO. UNESCO, WHO and other organisations do provide the forum for deliberation on practically every aspect of human development and progress. Are the benefits therefore, commensurate with the money spent and the time and energy devoted by the delegates to these global assemblies? Having been associated with the United Nations for over a decade and having had the privilege of organising many regional conferences on economic and social issues, l have often thought about this question. Upon reflection, feel convinced that these conferences serve a great purpose in crystalising the views of the international community on issues of common concern. A kind of international consensus grows on certain subjects through the mobilisation of ideas and views and their harmonisation in these conferences. For example, it would be impossible to address the problem of environmental pollution and degradation if the international community does not act in concert. Global warming or seal-level rise or the depletion of the ozone layer are issues which do not obey national boundaries. These problems can be tackled only if the action is jointly mounted on a global or re-

these global conferences. It is a matter of some satisfaction that after decades of neglect the question of development has now been placed at the top of the global agenda. The Earth Summit held in Rio was no doubt a conference on the environment but it was

gional basis. Interdependence

of nations is today a hard real-

ity of life. It is against this

background of the fundamental

change that has occurred in

the world that one has to view

produced a massive flow of refugees and forced migration. The brain-drain from Bangladesh is certainly a socially debilitating factor.

viewed against the perspective of development. As a result, today the concept of "sustainable development" has become an integral part of the philosophy of healthy economic development. Similarly, the Cairo conference on population also included the development process as an integral part of the population issue. It was universally recognised that a person's attitude towards the size of the family is conditioned by the cultural, social and economic environment in which he or she lives. It is, therefore, commendable that the international community recognised the basic truth that social change is inextricably inter-connected with the development process.

The factors impinging on social change and progress are so numerous that it would be difficult to short-list them. Three major themes were, therefore, chosen to ensure that the conference could concentrate on the key factors which will play a decisive role in social change in the years ahead. These are: (1) eradica tion of poverty, (2) employment, and (3) social disintegration. Obviously, all three themes are closely linked. There can be little doubt that the manner in which individual nations as well as the international community will tackle these issues will determine the shape of the societies of the future.

Living in one of the poorest countries of the world, we should have no difficulty in appreciating the need to accord the highest priority to the eradication of poverty. SAARC countries have adopted an ambitious plan for poverty alleviation but unfortunately, in these parts of the world words often fail to match action. According to a UN data 20 per cent of humanity now receives 83 per cent of all income, while the poorest 20 per cent have barely 1.5 per cent. A sobering thought indeed.

The employment picture in the poor countries such as ours is grim.

\* Twenty per cent of the world's total wage earners receive only 2 per cent of the world's income.

. World-wide, about 40 per cent of rural women work without wages on their families' farms.

I could quote many more data to show how this issue has become a key factor in ensuring political and social stability. The vast army of mastaans under the protective wing of the political parties proves the point most eloquently.

The third theme, social disintegration, is really the result of the first two. Conflict, a symptom of disintegration, has claimed more than 20 million lives since 1945. Over the last decade, conflicts within countries have increased; of the 82 armed conflicts between 1989 and 1992, '79 were domestic, many along ethnic lines: 90 per cent of casualties were civilians. Poverty, unemploy-

ment and conflict have also veteran Indian journalists. Only

Perhaps, the 'deaf and position's reluctance to relatest 'invitation' to the opposition for a fresh and direct by intransigence. A short course in human relations particularly for those who are engaged in a business that concerns 'management of men', which is called politics, take. You did a good job. What

the credit shared by all.

By all indications a general election is in the offing. It will be futile to whip a 'dead horse' Let us all join hands to pave the way for our future generations to live in peace and prosperity.

Abdul Kader. Bashabo, Dhaka



The Social Summit has issued a 10-point Declaration after intense debate, primarily between the developed and developing nation. An unprecedented 118 heads of state and government attended the Summit. Since the text of the 65-page Declaration is not yet available it is not possible to make a critical evaluation of the conference. However, the fact that a Declaration and A Programme of Action were unanimously adopted, despite reservations by some countries on certain sections, must be regarded as a positive gain.

The rich countries have, of course, avoided so far the financial responsibilities for implementing these decisions but their hypocrisy is getting increasingly exposed. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed of Malaysia rightly pointed out that we cannot go from one conference to another, pronouncing lofty global action programmes without providing adequate resources needed for implementing those programmes.

The emerging role of the NGOs in these conferences is a relatively new phenomenon. As

a molder of public perception on different questions they create the necessary public interest and support for different social programmes. At the Copenhagen Summit the NGOs acted as a powerful driving force behind the scene. Of course the people of Bangladesh might wonder what was gained by us from such a global conference. Will this result in a policy change leading to re-allocation of resources to the social sector? Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman's reported remark suggests, to me, that he is pleased about the Summit for the wrong reason. Instead of lecturing the inter-

national community about our social achievements, which by all accounts are meagre, we should learn from the experience of other developing countries and reorient our own development strategy by according higher priority to the social sector. Will the free market system advocated by the World Bank and the donor countries permit these change? The prevailing philosophy seems to work against an interventionist role by the government in dealing with issues such as poverty alleviation or unemployment or social disintegration. Can we harmonize these conflicting ideas and views? What role do we envisage for the NGOs? I hope the nation will address these basic issues in the coming months and years and the ideas generated and crystalised by the Social Summit will prove helpful in finding the right answers to these complex questions.

Our future hinges on our suc-

cess in this effort.

## Looking Back at

## March towards Independence

March 19, 1971

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. President of Awami League. strongly condemned the firing on the unarmed people, at Joydevpur earlier in the day

Talking to newsmen, he said: "If they think they can suppress people's struggle by bullet and force, they simply live in a fool's paradise."

He added it was an "uncalled for" action.

The Awami League Chief said he wondered how army could go to the Joydevpur Bazar when Martial Law authorities had stated that troops had already been withdrawn to the bar-Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said the people of Bangladesh

were no doubt in favour of peaceful settlement of the prob-

lems but that could not mean that the people "can be frightened by the use of force. No power on earth can suppress the people when they are prepared to shed blood." In reply to a question, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said he had already sent some of his partymen to the spot and added it could not be ascertained as yet how many persons were killed. He said curfew had been imposed in the area and as

such it was difficult even to pick up the injured persons from there. Later in the evening, addressing a gathering of Bishkhubdha Biggan Carmachari Union in front of his house, who had come in a procession, the Sheikh said the roads and lanes of "Bangla Desh" were stained with the blood of martyrs for the cause of the people. Today again, the roads of Joydevpur had

been besmeared with the blood of Bangalees. Sheikh Mujib told the slogan shouting crowd: "We wanted to resolve the problem peacefully but they want to rule us by force, with the help of weapons." The Awami League leader declared that the people of Bangladesh could not be suppressed by force. People would realise their rights at any cost, he added.

Meanwhile, the fateful talks between President Yahva Khan and the Awami League Chief, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, were resumed at the President's house.

Although the Awami League Chief, talking to newsmen after the meeting, did not say if any formula had been proposed to end the present constitutional deadlock the agreement to hold meeting at advisers' level itself indicates that some ground had been broken at the third round of talks between the President and the Awami League Chief today. But Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made no comment when a newsman asked him if the increased activities was any sign of progress in the talks. The Awami League Chief told the journalists: 'You may make your own assumption."

(Compiled by Aasha Meherin Amin)

# Untying the Gordian Knot of Our Politics

A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS

# 'The Crisis can Only be Solved through Dialogue'



The Daily Star (DS): What According to you are the reasons for the present political stalemate? What is the way out? Please elaborate your personal views on what should be the next step.

Khurshid Alam (KA): As 1 perceive, the foremost reason of the current political deadlock originated when the opposition parties felt ignored on many occasions in the Jativa Sangsach However, the Magura by-election can also be attributed as a major reason behind this stalemate, where the party-in-power was accused of serious vote rigging by the Opposition.

DS: Everyone is talking about elections, but when should it be held, within the next few months or later in the year or at it's scheduled time-early next year? Suggest measures to be taken for the timing of your choice.

KA: It is true that everyone is talking about elections. It is also true that any delay in holding the elections will only

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tory and practice of demo-

the implementation of such a

deepen the present political

Star questionnaire:

With the globalisation and liberalisation of economies developing countries are in on a marathon race. If we cannot keep pace with other countries, we will be in the back of the race. This ultimately will result in an inextricable economic predicament and social upheaval. If we cannot provide job opportunities to numerous unemployed youths through speedy industrialisation, the country will be girdled with social and political turmoil.

1. therefore, suggest that an election may be held as early as may be mutually agreed upon by the parties concerned.

DS: How to ensure an independent election commission? What are the pros and cons of the EC bill passed?

KA: In order to ensure an affirmatively independent Election Commission, adequate structural changes should be made to empower the Commission to enforce the election rules powerfully and vigorously and without any political influence whatsoever. We may consider to provide the Commission with necessary powers to prosecute the election-rules-violators. The Chief Election Commissioner should be a person of high integrity who can dispose the responsibilities with courage and determination.

DS: How formulate a code of conduct for political parties to hold elections? How to ensure KA: Any attempt to formu-

Khurshid Alam, Chairman of Dhaka Stock Exchange responds to The Daily

late and to impose a code of conduct for the political parties from outside would be counter-productive. The code of conduct as provided in the election rules should be strictly enforced by the Election Commission. The political parties should also try to develop a common code of econduct according to their political philosophy and party constitution.

The Election Commission may develop a code of conduct for contesting political parties and candidates through initiation of a dialogue. This will smoother the election process and help ensure a free and fair election.

DS: Do you think that there should be some sort of political understanding between the ruling party and the opposition to ensure a free and fair election? Is such an understanding possible? If yes, then what should be the next step? If no, why? What are your views on the mechanism under which the next election should be held? What about constitutional amendment?

KA: It is a common practice that there is political understandings between the party in power and the Opposition on the question of holding a free and fair election. It is felt that the party in power should concede to the demand for an election and sit with the

Opposition to reach an understanding to hold a free and fair election and to agree to a mechanism which will provide for such an election.

It is our consensus view that the democratic order. provides for a right climate for progressive development of trade and commerce. Confrontation has no place in the smooth practice of democracy. In the recent times we have observed that the fifty years old confrontation between the PLO and Israel, the imminent trade war between China and the USA gave way to peaceful resolution through dialogue. Even in South Africa, Nelson Mandela, after being jailed for 27 years did not turn around from the way of dialogue. rather he is following the democratic way regarding all political problems that has arised since his becoming the president of the country. He considers the opposition important, and is running the country collectively with the opposition

All political crisis may be solved through dialogue. Discussion is a synonym for democrascy. In fact, discussion is the essential quality of democracy. The present political stalemate can only be eliminated through fruitful political dialogue. And the Leader of the House has a responsibility to steer the country out of this political cloud through dialogue and statesmanship.

## The Efficacy of Bicameralism in Our Situation

cracy in various countries of the world, bicameralism strikes as a necessary adjunct of the democratic process, be it in the olden cradle of parliamentary democracy in the land of Albion or in the federalism of the new world. Fathers of our 1972 constitution probably bypassed the need for a second chamber primarily because they were in a hurry and not ready to accept a dilatory process to address the chaotic socio-economic situation of the famished country following a devastating war of liberation from the grip of Pakistani occupation who left no stone unturned to stifle the emerging nation-state in the very begin-

ning. Apart from this, a second

chamber could have been avoided on the consideration of economy, compact nature of the country etc. It is now felt that not only speed, but also deep consideration of issues is needed in a situation of crisis. In the wake of impatience to solve the problems of Himalayan magnitude, we could pass from parliamentary to presidential system in the quickest possible political process. Again it was felt convenient to tinker with the bases of state principles in relatively short-cut political

manipulations and try to

change the basic secular na-

ture of our constitution. All

these moves were made with-

in the event of a second chamber, constituting proportional dress to the gallery and occasionally do not find it convenient to call a spade a spade in the apprehension of losing public favour. A second chamber could handle such situations better. Some people of eminence so selected in the second chamber may also be considered to be included in the national cabinet. Some qualificational requirements for membership in second chamber may be considered: Graduation as minimum academic qualification, minimum 20 years of unstinted service in any national sector and 50 years of minimum age etc.

Now looking to the current political impasse, there were many attempts internal and international to find a consensus. These efforts could not succeed primarily because it would have given a feeling of inability on the part of the political leadership to solve such issues in usual political process. If we had a second chamber, much cooler discussions and dialogues could be fruitfully initiated. It is not out of place to point out that many of the genuine efforts including Ninian Mission to FBCCI move could not bear fruit mainly due to the fact that solution through such means would seem to have been brought about by forces, external to the political process in the country. There probably were the risks of loss of face for either

party in the event of a solution in such a way. A discussion in the second chamber could not be termed as external rather it could be deemed as an usual integrated political process.

Under these circumstances. it may be appropriate to make arrangement in the constitution for making provision for a second chamber consisting of 30-50 members with suitable representation from people of eminence and stature principally with advisory authority not totally blocking the verdict of the popular will, but, at times, inducing a dispassionate discourse on issues of national importance and examining and giving views on the bills passed by the parliament. Such a chamber may also make scope for representations of various communities, tribes, sects etc. who do not usually get adequate representation in popular franchise due to numerical constraints. In recent time, concerns have been voiced in various circles in respect of inadequate representation of various communities and groups in the national parliament. A second chamber can play the role of the conscience keeper of the nation. After all upper chambers in India, UK and other countries are not merely whiling away time, toil and money of their national exchequers.

The writer is a Professor (supernumerary) at Independent University, Dhaka.

### Dialogue of the deaf

Sir, Mahfuz Anam's yet another plea for a fruitful political dialogue (Third View 1.3.95), despite year-long massive failures, if read with veteran politician Oli Ahad's bold write-up entitled "A case for transparent leadership' (DS 28.2.95) and S A M S Kibria's warning against the danger of the current trend of politicalisation of administration (DS 2.3.95), will, perhaps. sum up the 'whole truth' about the inevitability of the coming doomsday. Mahfuz Anam's observation that "the current level of mutual suspicion between the ruling party and the opposition is unbelievable" will worry every sensible and patriotic citizen because suspicion breeds suspicion and any time worst may happen.

But why the past 'dialogue' failed? Language problem? Or, the leaders are really 'deaf as he has sarcastically suggested in the headline! Chinese philosopher Confucious has said, "If language is not correct, then what is said, is not what is meant. If what is said is not what is meant, then what ought to be done remains undone." Or, was it a crisis of conscience or absence of honesty of purpose? Notwithstanding the importance of language part in every 'dialogue' it is difficult for us to believe that our politicians did not

Naturally a question arises in idle brains as to how these leaders manage their talks in foreign countries? For instance, our prime minister during her visit to India last year not only discoursed with veteran Indian politicians, including Narasimha Rao, but also had informal chats with

understand their own language.

recently the leader of the opposition exchanged pleasantries with the American leaders during 'breakfast' in the company of the US President.

dumb' games still persist in the political horizon. The opspond to the prime minister's talks indicate that the last iota of wisdom has been eaten up though contemptible, runs like this: "I admit I made a misis your opinion? If you please, Thank you, and 'I' is the least important word."

In a democratic society ego tísm is forb**\*d**den. I have a word of praise for "The Daily Star" which, undaunted by many futile exercises in the past, has again offered its valuable spaces, perhaps, in a last ditch bid to 'untying the Gordian knot of politics in Bangladesh. In politics there is no 'last word'. If any quiet, calm and sensible deliberation could be held between the opposing contenders of power, it would certainly succeed and

## by M Taheruddin

out full consideration of the pros and cons of the unfolding situations. Probably an appropriate forum for dispassionate consideration of the underlying consequences of such moves was not in sight. Now, think of the situation

representation of the political parties in the parliament and choosing from among persons of eminence in the country. We cannot think of Prof Rehman Sobhan or even Dewan Azraf getting elected in a popular franchise. Nor would they relish much of the political hobnobbing, associated with the process. We have seen person like Dr Kamal Hossain felled by much less significant political timber in a predominantly middle class educated constituency in the fairest possible elections of 1991! A second chamber where people of eminence could be placed could bestow lights in hours of darkness and give a sober counsel to the political leadership at the hour of grave national need. Such a chamber could initiate a discussion for arriving at sensible solutions to problems of national interest. Although we are primarily a nation state, we have nationality and tribal problems which could be dealt with the required astute considerations. Directly elected public repre-

sentatives at times have to ad-