

Welcome to Hillary

Whatever maybe the official label put on it — she no doubt deserving the trappings of a state visit as the US' First Lady — we prefer to describe her visit as the magic name Hillary's pilgrimage to where the Clinton family's heart has always lain — Bangladesh. She and her daughter Chelsea are arriving here because of the magnetising pull of Prof. Yunus' Grameen Bank. It is not just a Bangladeshi celebrity bringing them here; for, they have met him quite a few times over, and could have done so anywhere else if they wished. In fact, it is the much broader concern for the under-privileged women and children which Prof Yunus has himself addressed tangibly to set a trend in rural revolution that has drawn her to his sites of some remarkably pioneering projects.

The Clinton family has been fond of Prof Yunus and his work without the slightest hint of patronisation and, that is where the genuineness of their love for the Grameen Bank lies almost as an article of faith. Their setting up of the good Hope Fund modelled on the Grameen concept a decade ago in Arkansas followed by the replication of the same in some other countries, have proved that the task of serving the poor is frontierless and indivisible.

So we see in her visit a rare kind of a prospect for bridge-building not only between the people of the USA and that of Bangladesh but also in terms of globalisation of poverty concerns which have been addressed rather inadequately so far by the world leadership.

It does us proud that she tied up her South Asian visits "keeping Grameen Bank and Bangladesh in focus." In diplomatic parlance, her trip reflects the measure of importance South Asia as a region has been enjoying with the White House lately.

For our part, we shall be content with her contributions to global awareness-building on child welfare and women empowerment issues.

Hearty welcome to Hillary, Chelsea and other members of the US contingent.

Costly Lessons

The fertiliser crisis has thrown up three issues. These relate to the citizens' right to know what and who really caused it; orderly distribution of whatever little urea we are able to get from the factories; and containment of damage in terms of Boro crop deficit that stares us in the face anyway.

As for the public's right to information, the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party has decided to institute a judicial probe into the crisis. This is a good development on a question that boiled over so much that an allegedly miscarried private distribution of the input went largely into the hands of Deputy Commissioners and as of this moment, the army personnel are being associated with the distribution work.

Evidently, the privatisation of the fertiliser distribution business is not at fault. If exports had drastically reduced its availability it is the decision to export that was grossly erroneous. If we produce, say, eight units of fertiliser and have an overall demand for the whole year at around six units, we are apparently surplus. But if someone or a few had soft-peddled this surplus to the authorities to obtain a decision in favour of export, deliberately ignoring the fact that out of the six units in total demand as many as four to five are required for January, February and March alone, then the blame-worthy can hardly remain in cognito.

We are largely time-barred though in regard to fertiliser distribution, except for the fact that in the northern areas Boro cultivation begins a bit later than in other parts of the country. However, we are for quick and incident-free distribution of fertiliser at the fag-end of Boro cultivation season. We take it that the lessons have been learnt for the next year.

Good, Affordable Medicines

Deputy Leader of the House Prof A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury has drawn attention to the need for bringing down the prices of medicines for the sake of effective healthcare. His suggestion came at a two-day South Asian Pharmaceutical Conference which concluded yesterday. Organised by the Bangladesh Pharmaceutical Society (BPS) and the International Pharmaceutical Federation (IPF), the conference provided an ideal occasion to make such an appeal. With almost identical health problems and prospects, the region can immensely benefit through sharing experiences and collaborating in the area.

Prof Chowdhury's concern for making quality medicines available to the people at a cheaper price stemmed from the fact that life saving drugs in our own country are costly and below quality at times. In some of these respects we have a problem different from what one finds in countries neighbouring us.

At present there is a real opportunity for the pharmaceutical companies to do good business while at the same time maintaining quality. In the absence of competition from outside, they nearly have had a monopoly market. Taking advantage of that some pharmaceutical companies not only did complain of high cost of raw materials but also adopted dubious means to increase their profit margins. With some honourable exceptions, many drug companies had to withdraw a number of substandard drugs from the market. By the time they were withdrawn, a large number of patients throughout the country had been treated with those medicines. And surprisingly, there was no court case against the manufacturers, let alone any punishment for this serious offence.

Then there was the scandal with paracetamol syrup. All this has made people suspicious about our local drugs. Needless to say, such a loss of confidence in the drug manufacturing companies cannot easily be repaired. If medicines become suspect, not only the doctors' reputation but also the dependability of the whole system of health care is called into question. Maybe, experiences from other South Asian countries can be of help.

Omphalos of the Empire: Savage War of Peace

Waliur Rahman

More people below poverty line live in this area than the entire planet taken together. Hillary Clinton's encounter with poverty and its benighting impact on human beings will be far removed from Rhode's Empire of bread and butter and an untouched area of inviting the initiative of men of character and leadership.

HILLARY Rodham Clinton's love for Albert Camus and Picasso is not for nothing: she is deeply conscious that plague never dies or disappears; it hides itself in everything only to reappear. The mindless destruction of the Spanish Civil War left in its wake a scar on human spirit; soon degenerated into the wasteland of Second World War. Guernica's savage and emotional vignette is always a reminder of man's beastiality to man.

First Lady Hillary Clinton embraces the vision of activist and compassionate government of her husband — she wants to play a more solid and meaningful role. The role of first lady was more difficult in 18th and 19th centuries. Abigail Adams was taunted with the derisive name 'Mrs. President'. But 20th century has given them more leeway. Woodrow Wilson's second wife Edith Bolling Galt encoded and decoded sly messages. Eleanor Roosevelt was the genteel, sophisticated — perfect mate for her husband. Jacqueline Kennedy gave a certain sophistication to the office with her background of French culture, love for the arts and the finer things of life. Barbara Bush was the beloved first lady.

Hillary Clinton gives the impression of discarding the Cinderella syndrome: once you get the Prince Charming, you live happily ever after.

She eschewed the ceremony and the ritual of the camelot White House and has chosen to take on the challenge of the problems both in America and the world at large. The same idealism that prompted her to strive relentlessly for the gigantic task of reaching health care to all the American homes is prompting her to take interest in the world's poor.

If you don't build the castle of peace in human minds, effort to build peace in the world outside will be infructuous. The US First Lady's resolve to accept this challenge is to be seen in her present visit to an area which boasts itself of inhabiting 1.2 billion people — about one fifth of the world population. This is the same area which the Cambridge historian, John Seeley thought as an immense 'Majestas Romana' established among two hundred and fifty million of human beings. Thomas Earlyle, Benjamin Disraeli, Cecil Rhodes all developed this romantic and imperial sensitivity. The Primrose League with its motto 'emporium et libertas', together with Disraeli's Crystal Palace speech of 1872 made imperialism a powerful force characterised by a drive to 'occupy, fortify, grab and brag'.

But today's answer is to be found in 'Imperium in Imperio' — power is higher dispensation and not in the chivalry and swashbuckling Don Quixote of Jennyson's Idylls of the King!

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and an untouched area of inviting the initiative of men of character and leadership. Her peripatetic journey in the 'Omphalos of the Empire' (Pax Britannica) will bring her to the world moulding itself in post — 1947 as independent states. India the mightiest and most energetic is the veritable power house of synergy; implosion of economic libertarian policies are beaoning her to the 21st century. Pakistan's self-inflicted wound of righteousness is stalling her movement forward. Their nuclear programmes deprive them both of scarce resources. Sri Lanka is surging ahead in spite of a bloody ethnic war. The new government of Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga has a big advantage — she is experimenting with ideas — and she will succeed.

In Bangladesh we have some problem — we seem to have run out of ideas. The US First Lady would do well to note that the HDI ranking of Sri Lanka is 90, with 135 for India, 132 for Pakistan and 146 for Bangladesh.

In the happenstance of her being in 'a rats alley' of political reflection, she may realise that in this sub-continent consensus politics is in the retreat, at least in this moment. Nelson Mandela here will be hard put to invite their former jailers to attend inaugural ceremonies! But the religion of peace and ahimsa — Buddhism flourished in this very South Asia.

Power of vested interest is

vastly exaggerated compared to the power of ideas. This was certainly at the back of her mind, when the US First Lady addressed the UN World Summit of Social Development in Copenhagen on March 8 where she announced new American initiative to fight female illiteracy in Asia, Africa and Latin America to ensure women's empowerment. Forty thousand children die everyday. Three days' death toll of children is equivalent to the total people annihilated in Hiroshima and Nagasaki! Thus a total of 15 million children perish every year!

Born on the blood of three million martyrs, the new nation of Bangladesh did not do all that badly as the WB statistics show: The GDP growth was 7% with small industries accounting for 17%. People living below poverty line was 50%, unemployment 15% and external debt was only \$ 690m. dollars. But today the proportion of population living below absolute poverty line is 86% in Bangladesh, 40% in India and 32% in Pakistan. She will note that in Bangladesh in 1992, 600000 children died before the age of 5. 48 million people did not have access to health services, 30 million people consumed less than 1000 calorie per day, per capita, 42 million adults are illiterate, 11.5 million children under five are malnourished and five million children in the primary schools were out of school. It is a grim picture. It is no wonder, therefore, that

around unearned favours and fixed assets. Third world corruption consists mostly of stealing and squandering the nation's resources; it rarely creates wealth. Plots and sedans, licenses and unpayable loans, contracting and contracting are deployed as instruments of enriching the elite, and of perpetuating the structure of underdevelopment.

Five, focus on a host of social indicators which normally signal whether a society is headed for growth or stagnation; is your government investing seriously in the surest of growth stocks — education? How many laws were enacted recently to protect and advance the rights of women, workers, peasants, and minorities? Did your country import and assemble more private or more transport vehicles last year? How many miles of new railways were added? By what percentage were power failures reduced in major cities? By what percentage did your foreign debt decrease, or did it — God forbid — increase? Did the population growth abate in response to government efforts; or did its indifference habits intact?

Six, in this era of privatization and foreign investments it is crucial to keep a sensible count of things that matter. For two heady years, perfectly educated Mexicans danced around the dollar investments in their country. In 1995 they woke up to a disaster. Their economy is in ruins; in a single month the peso has fallen forty-five per cent. As NAFTA's mid-wife, President Clinton is straining to bring Mexico back from the brink. Not many third world countries have Mexico's safety net as the United States neighbour and as member of an American-led trade bloc; but they do have lessons to learn from it. Among those the following: (i) Selling family jewels or antique furniture (read privatization) is not the same as generating wealth. And if one does not use the proceeds to pay off debts, then

one has merely perpetuated responsibility. (ii) Do not confuse MOUs — Memorandums of Understanding — with actual investment; in this case the distance between the cup and the lip is often measured in miles. Governments propose while corporations dispose according to their estimations of profit and their priorities. Washington in particular has perfected the skills of mixing politics with business, and has been using MOUs as bait. Thus Mikhail Gorbachev was rewarded with billions in MOUs of which less than \$500 million dollars in investments actually materialized. (iii) Do not ever



The US First Lady has chosen to visit Bangladesh, primarily at the invitation of Prof. Mohammad Yunus who as the Chief of Grameen Bank is on a mission to attack the problems enumerated above.

Economic security for Bangladesh cannot be ensured without empowering women. Grameen Bank is just doing that. Other NGOs such as BRAC and Proshika are also engaged in the same direction. They are responding. The most disadvantaged and benighted in Bangladesh have proved that they are more credit-worthy than the most affluent in the society.

Hillary Clinton was much moved during her recent Italian journey at the massacre at the Abbey of Monte Cassino; over 60 thousand died; and later at Nettuno and Anzio where thousands of American marines lie in peace in the military cemeteries. This is

the same place we understand, where five hundred years ago, the Turkish buccaneer Barbarossa (red beard) commanding the fleet of Ottoman Sultan Suleiman II with two thousand men came to have a glimpse of the most famous beauty of the time, Giulia Gonzaga!...

The Americans in the cemeteries did not perhaps see a Giulia Gonzaga, but they saw peace, wrested from Hitler's aggression. The First Lady knows well that the peace can very easily be lost in the quicksand of political bankruptcy and the quagmire of poverty and hopelessness. Her visit to the sub-continent will bring her face to face with this reality.

The only superpower with a six-and-a-half trillion dollar GDP, America can bequeath a permanent legacy to the world so that the agony of Monte Cassino or the silence of Nettuno do not haunt us anymore. A Wellesley graduate and a Methodist, the First Lady has abiding faith in the innate goodness of human beings, its unbounded potential. As President Clinton is privy to her thought that there is always a tomorrow with hope, we can also learn from her that politics is the art of the possible. An a priori condition of the culture of democracy and civil society is tolerance. Didn't Cicerone say, 'one should not listen to those who maintain that political enemies merit boundless hatred?'

Omphalos of the modern day sort... is it Pax Americana? A very hearty welcome to Bangladesh.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to Italy and Switzerland and Additional Foreign Secretary.

Your Country's Balance Sheet

by Eqbal Ahmad

For two heady years, perfectly educated Mexicans danced around the dollar investments in their country. In 1995 they woke up to a disaster. Their economy is in ruins; in a single month the peso has fallen forty-five per cent. As NAFTA's mid-wife, President Clinton is straining to bring Mexico back from the brink. Not many third world countries have Mexico's safety net as the United States neighbour and as member of an American-led trade bloc; but they do have lessons to learn from it.

countries. And they travel extensively.

Two, take a count of the entourage your leader took on each journey, the golden rule being that the larger the entourage the worse the government. Typically, third world leaders carry crowds with them. By contrast, first world leaders move with a few aides. About fifteen years ago, I went over to the UN Plaza Hotel in New York to see a friend Olof Palme who was then Prime Minister of Sweden. He was there to attend the UN General Assembly which was then discussing the Non-Aligned countries' call for a New Economic Order. The hotel lobby was crowded with Africans. The Angolan president, not Agostino Neto, had just arrived; his entourage consisted of 102 persons. I met Palme in his suite on the tenth floor. He had obviously told his private secretary that there was no need to take notes; she ordered coffee and left the room. Curious, I asked how many came on his delegation. "Four," he said. "Remarkably small," I had said. "Not quite," he replied "we are aided by the staff of the Swedish Mission to the UN."

Three, consider the extent and nature of corruption in government, and the leadership's attitude towards it. Few governments anywhere are free of corruption. During growth periods of capitalist industrialism corruption tends to be widespread in higher echelons of government. In England such luminaries and empire builders as Robert Clive and Warren Hastings were impeached by the parliament for corruption. In the United States, the high-growth era which followed the civil war is known as the Gilded Age; it soiled the heroic reputation of Ulysses S. Grant while another American president — Andrew Johnson — barely escaped impeachment by a Congress in 1968. Even today, as the Lockheed and Watergate scandals showed, corruptions of money and power prevail in

advanced industrial democracies. The linkage then between corruption and economic growth is not necessarily negative. Therefore corruption should be viewed analytically though without losing sight of the fact that in all circumstances it is morally reprehensible and harmful to society.

Several factors are important in judging the effects of corruption on the future of society. There is the question of extent. Widespread corruption eats like an epidemic of termites into the foundations of state and society. By contrast, sectoral and episodic corruption is manageable if the institutional mechanisms to punish and reform are made to work reasonably well. In Britain and the US whose examples are cited above it is through the workings of these corrective mechanisms that the state protected itself from corruption, and even enhanced its authority in society. Then there is the question of attitude. Under dictatorships, citizens live helplessly with corruption in high places; they are virtually under occupation. In a democracy if the press does its job, it exposes major financial scandals. But the government and parliament do not respond with effective investigation and disclosure, then the purpose of democracy is defeated, and the state suffers diminution of authority. Finally, the nature of corruption matters. Corruption may be linked to production; or it may be wasteful theft. A bribe taken from an investor in return for a quick clearing of bureaucratic hurdles is illegal and immoral; but in the circumstances it may not harm the country much. But a bribe to favour one arm seller over another is likely to hurt both the security and economy of the country.

Four, examine the land, license, and loan allotments a government has made in a given period. These are third world bellwethers. Corruption, being generally unproductive in these countries, revolves

around unearned favours and fixed assets. Third world corruption consists mostly of stealing and squandering the nation's resources; it rarely creates wealth. Plots and sedans, licenses and unpayable loans, contracting and contracting are deployed as instruments of enriching the elite, and of perpetuating the structure of underdevelopment.

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OPINION

Distant Thunder

Abu Raihan Omar

Almost everyday the same news is appearing on national dailies. Farmers are getting killed. Their only fault is that they want to produce more foodgrains, so that the nation could get two meals a day. They want to alleviate poverty; they want Bangladesh to be self sufficient in food. To produce more they need fertilizer; they need diesel for irrigation; they need fair price for inputs and outputs thereof. But it appears that somebody does not want these to happen. On 21st March, 1995 the authorities identified that 'somebody' as the Chairman of BCIC and sacked him from his job. Was he the only person responsible? As far as in October/November 1994 it was reported in newspapers that SSP was being imported in the name of TSP. The Customs authorities have the names and addresses of those importers. It would not be unwise to ask that what action has been taken against those importers? Has any enquiry been conducted to find out why bungling in distribution of fertilizer started at all?

We do admit that this is the era of free economy. Therefore, the marketing of fertilizers should be decentralized, decontrolled. But does that mean instead of one BADC a number of BADCs had to be created in the form of dealers? And who are these dealers? What were the criteria of appointment of such dealers?

BCIC is a state-owned enterprise. Irrespective of ownership, an industrial unit is judged by its performance. And performance is judged by profit making abilities. Production and marketing are the two main pillars of profitability. Production is useless unless it is marketed. Every producing unit all over the world has its own marketing and sales units. They create market. Look after the market demand, forecasts needs and determine sale prices keeping cost, competition and demand in mind.

Many of the multinationals and local enterprises have dealers and distributors. But even then they maintain their own marketing and sales team to oversee the dealers or distributors. In case of BCIC fertilizer where the demand is less than the production and cost is less than the selling price, there is not a single reason in economics for prices to increase.

The 12 crore people of Bangladesh as shareholders of BCIC has the right to know what did the marketing and sales department of BCIC do? The state minister could hear the whisper but BCIC was so deaf they are still unable to hear the thunder! Late President Sattar had the guts to fire 11000 bank officials but the present incumbents are happy to remove only one official.

Let us make no mistake that if the farmers who constitute 80 per cent of our nation get the slightest feeling that they are being cheated or being used or being made scapegoats for others' benefit; the fire that would be lit would require Herculean effort to extinguish. As it is, they are being deprived of fair price of their products, they are below poverty level, they do not have access to many basic human rights and needs. But they live with a hope, they still cherish a good harvest. The ingredients of their dreams are seeds, fuel and fertilizer. Let us not take away their dream. By sacrificing their lives the dreams must not become nightmares.

Let the authorities admit to the nation that they have bungled. May it be unknowingly or for experimental reasons. Let the authorities apologize to the farmers for the killings.

To the Editor...

Politics and people

Sir, The allegation of vote rigging in elections has proved to be one of the best weapons to the opposition political parties to give birth to a political crisis. The process of democracy is now in a serious threat in our country centering on this issue. Efforts were made to solve the crisis for greater interest of democracy and stability but ultimately all proved to be unfruitful. Understanding the gravity of the crisis, the present government has taken up a programme to introduce voter's identity cards and strengthen the Election Commission by giving it more power.

Now, the question is if a better polling system is introduced what will then be the next tool to begin a political

crisis in future. Motiur Samad Chowdhury Phulatala Tea Estate, Sylhet

Expansion of judiciary

Sir, Since British time there exist Munsiff and Magistrate courts at our thana level.

The previous BNP Govt. set up courts of Asst. Sub-Judge at the then sub-division level. In 1982, all the thanas were brought within the ambit of Munsiff and Magistrate courts. The newly-created 64 districts were also provided with courts of Dist./Sessions Judge and Additional, Dist./Sessions Judge. Similarly High Court Division benches were set up at Chittagong, Sylhet, Rangpur, Jessore, Barisal and Comilla.

Save High Court Division benches and courts at Thana level all are functioning.

A section of interested circle in the capital protested against the setting up of High Court Division benches outside the capital and setting up of courts at thana level.

In India and Pakistan High Court benches are functioning outside provincial capitals. The aim and the objective of setting up such courts were to meet the needs of the people living far from the capital, and give them the benefit of High Court Division benches. The idea of setting up High Court Division benches outside Dhaka was put forward by National Lawyers Association, Dhaka to the president of the country in 1980.

Article 109 of the Constitution provides for ses-

sion of High Court Division outside capital if the Chief Justice is satisfied of the necessity and if it is approved by the President. There are about 60 thousand cases pending in High Court Division. Hence, the need for High Court Division benches outside capital — at Chittagong, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet, Mymensingh — is thus imperative. And for proper functioning of subordinate courts and to cope with the present rush of cases in the courts of Assistant Sessions Judge/Subordinate Judge withdrawal of the appellate civil jurisdiction also needed.

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