

Hillary's Midas Touch

This has been a most heart-warming visit Bangladeshis have ever been host to. The centre-piece of Hillary Clinton's trip was her contact with the grassroots level here.

Hillary never tired of telling everywhere she went to that the gain has been hers — all the way. She said, almost in a refrain, that she learnt a good deal, her heart filling with satisfaction to see the work being done here and that the impressions she was carrying home would be useful in her humanitarian pursuits in the USA.

We have a very special appeal to make to Hillary and to the members of the media team who accompanied her. You have seen the face of our struggle against poverty and the role the development workers are playing in it.

Hillary's visit has done for us what perhaps a billion dollar worth of contrived public relations or image-building exercise by us overseas would have failed to deliver.

Security Breach

Sunday night's break-in at the office of the Finance Minister and that of the Banking Secretary has once again thrown the question of security of files open.

Happily though the intruders' attempt failed through this time around. Although they had time enough to rummage through as many as 12 rooms apparently they left empty-handed with none of the files missing.

The finance ministry is located in the secretariat, the most important and supposedly the best protected building complex of the government. If the security there is so vulnerable that outsiders can enter there surreptitiously at night, confidential files of all ministries are equally at risk.

Given the difficulty of access to the secretariat, the break-in could not have been possible without some help from inside.

Environmental Threat

We have long been suspecting this. Now the confirmation comes from an authority to the effect that the country has no more than five to six per cent of forest cover.

However, we have become so callous that we may not get alarmed at all. There is no guarantee that even the present level of forest cover will be maintained, let alone its improvement to a more reasonable and healthy level.

Expansion of homestead is directly linked to the increase of population. Urbanisation and deforestation also relate to the growth of population but with better planning the losses can be minimised and new forests can be grown within our limited land-area.

Perhaps we need changes in our habits as well. The other day a report quoted an authoritative source as saying that the nation can save Tk 800 crore annually simply by switching over to un-boiled rice instead of the boiled variety we eat saving fuel in the process.

THE conquest of Mexico happened in 1520. With his well-built ships and newly discovered navigational techniques, the Spanish General Cortes penetrated the 'New World' and — by an unrelenting process of deception, betrayal, warfare, and wanton violence — subdued and destroyed the mighty Aztec empire.

It was a momentous event in history the agony of a most violent and transforming world system of domination that humanity has ever experienced. We know it as the age of western, capitalist imperialism. Yet, not one of the future victims of this behemoth — not the Indians and Chinese, nor Arabs or Africans — took notice of it until, that is, it was too late.

It is strange that contemporary Asian and African elites travel now on information highways but they appear even

The Reconquest of Mexico

by Eqbal Ahmad

Since the outbreak of the crisis in early January, the Mexican peso has plummeted 67%. The Bolsa, bellwether of Mexico's stock market has fallen 62%. Bank rates have risen 67%. Unemployment has begun to soar. Most economists believe these to herald severe recession.

more unknowing than their ancestors were centuries ago. Despite the warnings of such sages as Rabindranath Tagore, they became hooked into the ideology of nationalism and the quest of nation states. That done, they embraced the shibboleths of the cold war, bit into derived notions of bipolarity and national security.

Among Emperor Market's 'emerging' favorites none matched the lures of Mexico. As the US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin emphasizes repeatedly, Mexico 'has been the proto-type economy, an exemplar of the way to privatize big industries, open markets, and create a growing middle class eager to buy imports'.

It all started in the late 1980s after Nicholas Brady, George Bush's Treasury Secretary crafted the 'Brady Plan'. Its goal was insure repayments on the huge commercial debts many third

world countries had incurred. Built into the complex formula were the appearance of America's generosity toward the third world and the assurance of full profit for American capital. Banks agreed to reduce the total amount of debts (which were likely to be being defaulted) in return for the debtor country's commitment to resume regular repayments.

In just two months Mexico suffered a catastrophe, from which it may not recover for many years, certainly not without sacrificing its sovereignty. Since the outbreak of the crisis in early January, the Mexican peso has plummeted 67%. The Bolsa, bellwether of Mexico's stock market has fallen 62%.

Rich countries, especially the United States, have huge investments in Mexico. So they have devised a 'rescue plan' of which the largest component is the \$20 billion in US loans and guarantees. Others have also chipped in: (i) Loan of \$1.78 billion from the International Monetary Fund. (ii) Short term loan of \$10 billion from the Bank for International Settlements.

The total of new debts comes to \$52.8 billion which Mexico must repay with interest. But the price tag is higher than that, it includes Mexico's sovereignty. The US loan agreement imposes on Mexico what the New York Times editorial described as 'harsh, though necessary restrictions on Mexico's monetary and fiscal policies'.

Mexico's strict diet of au-

terity is to be administered under watchful American supervision. This 'diet' includes a regime of tight money and raised interest rates. The tight money requirement prevents the government of Mexico from spending state funds even to stimulate employment and the economy.

Robert Rubin, the American Secretary for Treasury spoke of the loan package as aimed at 'preventing the underpinnings of the Mexican economy from crumbling'. It makes sense that the US should want to halt Mexico's economic breakdown. After all, Mexico ran neck-to-neck with Japan as the US's second largest trading partner.

quarter of 1994 it bought more than \$51 billion in imports from the US while Japan bought \$51.7 billion. Moreover, recession in Mexico will undoubtedly put pressures of illegal immigration on USA.

Yet, a reading of the 'bail-out-Mexico' package suggests that its immediate aim is to rescue the American and European financial institutions and individuals who had invested there in hopes of making a fast-buck. Thus, half of the \$20 billion US loan is to enable Mexico to pay off those American investors who had invested mostly in the bonds (tesobonos) and certificates. The remaining \$10 billion will be held for 'contingencies'.

Two questions arise: what factors have caused Mexico to get so deep in economic trouble that it must sacrifice, for a time at least, both its people's well-being and its national sovereignty? What lessons do the case of Mexico hold for the other countries which are seeking, so eagerly and so unquestioningly, to fall into the grasping embrace of 'emperor market'?

The Author is an eminent US based Pakistani political scientist. He has written several books and contributes regularly to newspapers in USA, Middle-East and Pakistan, and occasionally to this paper.

Bhutto Wants Her Aircraft — or Her Money Back

Tariq Butt writes from Islamabad

With Indian and Pakistani nuclear capabilities in the spotlight as the nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty comes up for renewal this month, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's visit to the US (11 April) gives her a chance to put her case to Washington.

GUNS not butter are the top priority for Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto during her visit to the United States.

She wants military hardware, particularly the 38 F-16 aircraft for which the bill is \$1.4 billion.

To get the fighters, Bhutto has to persuade Washington to remove Islamabad from the focus of the Pressler Amendment, a US law which enables aid to be cut to countries believed to be developing nuclear weapons.

Application of the legislation to Pakistan in 1990 fractured 43 years of military co-operation and has left senior officials here feeling abandoned and mistreated by the US in the post-Cold War era.

"We have repeatedly told Washington that the Amendment discriminates against Pakistan and has not served as a check against nuclear proliferation," says Foreign Minister Sardar Aseef.

The aid block is serious because throughout the Cold War the US has been Pakistan's predominant source of military hardware.

"The block has created a serious military imbalance between Pakistan and India," says Defence Minister Aftab Shahban Mirani, a line Bhutto will pursue during her talks in Washington in April.

She is cautious about the prospects of success: "I can bring F-16s tomorrow if we are ready to pay a price," she says in an effort to cool expectations. "But we will not compromise on our national interests and principles."

Washington's price is Pakistan's signature on the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Pakistan says its nuclear programme is designed as a deterrent to India, which exploded a nuclear device in 1974. Says Foreign Office official Munir Akram, "We are ready for any restrictions on the nuclear programme if they are also imposed on India."

Several years discussions have failed to break the Pressler Amendment deadlock, but Bhutto will be pressing for a special waiver to get at the blocked supplies. She will also argue that if the hardware is not released Pakistan should be reimbursed the \$658 million it has paid so it can obtain equipment elsewhere.

She may take up an argument outlined by P I Cheema, professor of international relations at Quaid-e-Azam University, who urges the US

investment in Pakistan since independence in 1947 stands at only \$45 million.

Her strongest cards in dealing with Washington are goodwill generated by the prompt extradition of Ahmad Yousef Ramzi, accused of masterminding the bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York in 1993, and by the expulsion of Arabs who fought with the Afghan guerrillas against the Soviet-backed government in Kabul.

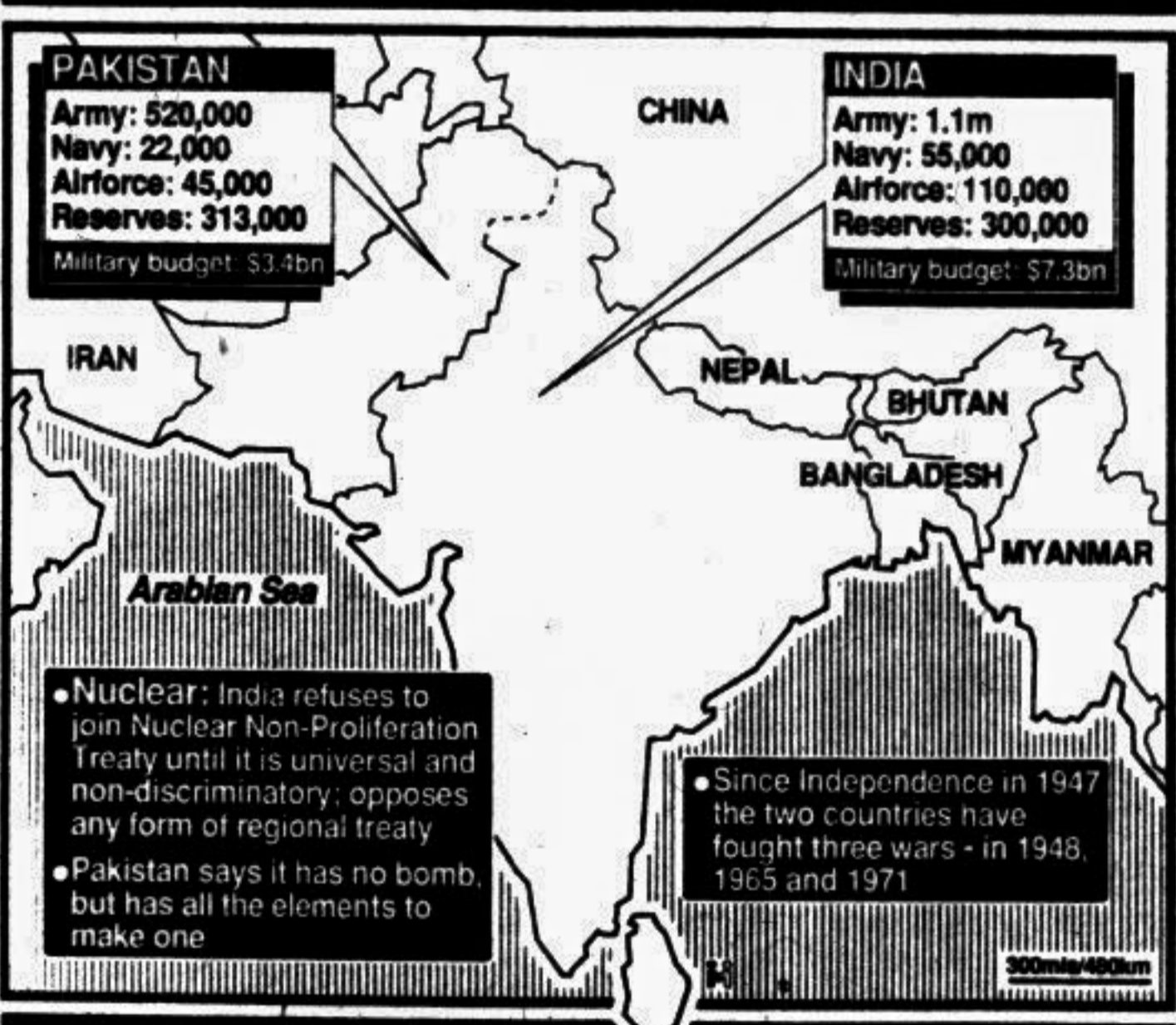
Her government has also told non-government organisations to

also used its moderating influence with other Islamic countries.

And in January, US Defence Secretary William Perry also described Pakistan as a "moderate Islamic state" — a description that was music to the ears of Bhutto and top officials. It means the Prime Minister's negotiating position will not be distracted by US questions about fundamentalism.

TARIQ BUTT is on the staff of 'The News', Islamabad. The government of Pakistan

Bordering on war



to realise that its stance forces Pakistan to put more reliance on nuclear weapons 'since its conventional arms capability is going down'.

Pressler also jeopardises pledges by US investors of energy sector investments worth \$3.5 billion because the legislation prevents guarantees for investments in Pakistan by the US Overseas Private Investment Corporation.

Bhutto will hold a series of meetings with American executives. Despite the energy sector promises, US private

stop collecting funds for militants fighting Indian control in the disputed province of Kashmir.

These moves, together with the recent confiscation of the property of seven known narcotic barons, have averted the danger of the country being placed on Washington's watch-list of terrorist states.

In approving aid for the drive against drugs, Washington recently described Pakistan as "a strategically-located, moderate Islamic state with a nuclear weapons capability."

To the Editor...

Distressing statistics

Sir, I came across a distressing statistics in the Hong Kong-based weekly magazine 'Asia Week' of January 27, 1995 which showed that while the number of people-per-police in Bangladesh was just 183 in the year 1980, it increased to 2,756 in 1995.

Would somebody in the police department, may be the Public Relations section, if they have one, respond to my query?

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A Z M Abdul Ali House 9, Road 11, Uttara Model Town, Dhaka.

Power failure

Sir, Faridabad and Gandaria are well-known residential areas in the old part of Dhaka metropolitan city. Seven to eight lakh people live in these localities. For the past few weeks residents of Faridabad and Gandaria have been experiencing intermittent power failure. Power failure has been

virtually chronic here occurring every night starting from dusk. In these hot sultry nights the sufferings of the residents especially the school and college going students know no bounds when fans do not move and lights do not burn in their congested homes.

Many times I complained about this power failure in Faridabad and Gandaria areas to the authorities concerned but to no effect. This time I hope the DESA authorities concerned would cure this problem. Won't they?

Mahbubuddin Chowdhury 17, Hari Charan Roy Road Faridabad, Dhaka 1204.

Bureaucratic Mystique in South Asia

by A K M Jalaluddin

ACR-II

Another Love Letter

HAFIZ Ishaque was the Chief Secretary, East Pakistan and later became the Secretary of the Federal Government in the Ministry of Labour. Ishaque had a reputation of being competent and 'a cut above the run-of-the-mill bureaucrat'.

My dear Secretary, I have been informed by the concerned authorities of your comment, that I lacked in a sense of proportions. I should be grateful if you would kindly let me know of the specific

cases/occasions when I showed a lack of the sense of proportions.

Ishaque promptly wrote back a solid love letter:

"My dear XYZ, I am saddened to receive your letter. You should yourself remember the cases/occasions when your lack of sense of proportions and judgement were pointed out to you, albeit politely. It was your business to take note of the cases so that you could improve."

I have now the unfortunate duty to report further that not only you lacked in a sense of proportions but you also lacked in retentive faculties. I hope you will be able to overcome these deficiencies and become worthy of the cadre to which you are fortunate to belong.

OPINION

Green Jute Pulp: A Clarification

This has reference to your editorial 'The Chewing Syndrome' carried on March 31, 1995. We appreciate the concern and interest which you are correctly showing about tangible progress on green jute-based manufacture of pulp and paper.

You would appreciate that any Bangladeshi worth his salt would be euphoric about this significant breakthrough. As such, the Minister's interest in the matter is in no way to overplay the issue at anybody's cost. We draw your kind attention to the recommendations of the national workshop held on 13-14th October, 1994 at BCIC Bhaban on jute pulping which was participated by the senior representatives of Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR), Bangladesh Jute Research Institute (BJRI), Bangladesh Forest Research Institute (BFRI), Dhaka University, BJMC, BCIC etc.

The news of indigenous breakthrough in pulp and paper making was appreciated by the IJO, which can be seen in their letter dated 4th January '94 vide page 102 of the Report. Had IJO any techno-economic study on green jute pulping, they would have invariably referred to the same. Further breakthrough in producing Rayon Grade pulp from green jute on commercial scale is continuing in all four pulp and paper mills under BCIC. Mentionably, the production of this green jute pulp is more cost effective in comparison to pulp made out of conventional raw materials like bamboo and wood.

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international organisation, such information would have been available with the respective organisations and published paper regarding techno-economic feasibility of green jute would have been placed in the workshop. However, the workshop did not have the benefit of the privilege of any work done regarding techno-economic feasibility of green jute as pulping raw material. This would have made the job of BCIC much easier in manufacturing commercial batch of pulp to evaluate the techno-economic viability of Green Jute pulping which was carried out successfully at Sylhet Pulp & Paper Mill testing laboratory. Needless to mention, this laboratory is comparatively equipped with much less sophisticated equipment than a Research Organisation in this field. Following the technological breakthrough attained in the manufacturing pulp from green jute in Sylhet Pulp & Paper Mills, production of pulp from green jute on commercial scale is continuing in all four pulp and paper mills under BCIC. Mentionably, the production of this green jute pulp is more cost effective in comparison to pulp made out of conventional raw materials like bamboo and wood.

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new item of sale for the jute growers. BCIC has produced till date 10,200 MT pulp and paper and the balance quantity of green jute will enable the pulp and paper mills to produce further 1,500 MT pulp raising the level of immediate production of pulp to 11,700 MT. The country has saved Tk 50 crore through production of pulp from green jute. Karnaphuli Rayon & Chemical Company (KRC) has manufactured 103 MT GRSF (Green Jute Staple Fibre) from green jute pulp made in Karnaphuli Paper Mill and this has also yielded saving of Tk 1.29 crores in foreign exchange. Khulna Newsprint Mill and North Bengal Paper Mill which use Gewa and Bagasse low grade FRM (Fibrous Raw Material) necessitating blending with superior quality pulp imported from abroad. As such production in these two mills would have come to a halt or import of paper would have been required, had the successful production of 10,000 MT pulp not been achieved.

Furthermore, we are confident that breakthrough that has been made in green jute based pulp, paper and rayon and fabrication of 65% heavy pulping machinery (reference process, flow chart, page 146 of the Report) are not really 'chewing syndrome' but silent march towards tangible achievement. Moreover, this techno-economic breakthrough has been internationally recognised and appreciated.

Joint Venture proposal are being received by BCIC for setting up pulp, paper and GRSF manufacturing projects based on green jute. BCIC is confident that by September '95, not only 2500 MT pulp would be produced but in all probability the target would be exceeded. The appreciative message of the Hon'ble Prime Minister of the success of the action programme concerning green jute based pulp and paper production speaks for itself.

Mirza A Matin Sr. General Manager (PR) BCIC, Dhaka