

## A Warning to Heed

Cyclonic storm with tidal surges in the wake has hit the three coastal districts of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Noakhali. To the usual targets of Kutubdia and Maheshkhal, Teknaf has been added as getting a severe lashing. The initial impact was feared to have gained in severity as the storm travelled inland towards Sitakunda.

The first and possibly the worst aspect of these elemental invasions, by now become routine, is that a clear picture of the devastation wrought is hard to get even days after the strike. Scanty information can result only in inadequate and ineffective response from government as well as society. In brass tacks terms from the former and in moral and emotional terms, from the latter. Both are equally important. Inaccessibility of the terrain and high frequency of the storms are joined in by unflagging official exertion to suppress damage reports to make it nearly impossible for the society to have any real picture of how man is surviving down there and how can they be helped.

It is a matter of only weeks that another spell of storms and surges has hit the self-same area. Foreign media complained that the people in the area did not then receive any proper warning. That the toll in death was negligible owed more to the affected people's own good sense than any organised governmental exercise. It is the aftermath that hurts the people more — suffering and dying not directly at the hand of nature but falling a pitiable prey to ineptness of human agencies. The overall impression of government's performance then in minimising the maulings done by the aftermath is quite unflattering. It seems that no lesson has been learnt from the April 30, '91 cataclysmic disaster. And this is unpardonable.

Was the administration this time prepared with failsafe arrangements for reaching water, food and medicare in sufficient quanta and with enough speed? If this time too they are found wanting, we shall have reasons to fear very grave failures from the government agencies in case 91-size disasters which may strike any time in the following five months. What would those failures mean? We shudder to think of that infernal scenario. The government should take care not to repeat its too-much-too costly performances.

## Nepal in Quandary

Nepal is teetering on the edge of political volatility, ironically in a companionship with democracy and electoral politics which had replaced an absolute monarchical rule some four years ago. While the first elected government that came to power in 1991 — formed by the Nepali Congress — lasted more than three years, the last one, led by the Communist Party leader Manmohan Adhikary, has proved far more short-lived — only six months.

If fighting inside the Nepali Congress had weakened it to a point of losing power in 1994, it is in the results of the last November elections that one finds the reason for the undoing of Adhikary's communist government. Just how fragile a minority government can be has only been driven home. In the last general election, the Communists had secured 88 seats, the Nepali Congress 83 and the National Democratic Party 20 seats. The last-named party holding the key to power balance in the parliament has now switched support from the Communist Party to the NCP. The pro-Indian Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP) has acted in a similar fashion. The Nepali Congress and the parties supporting it threatening to move a no-confidence motion in Parliament against the minority government accusing it of 'totalitarianism.' Prime Minister Adhikary decided to avoid the slowdown; he has recommended to the King that he dissolve parliament and announce mid-term polls. King Virendra has acted in his own light convening a special session of Parliament on June 16 to dispose of the no-confidence motion moved by the NCP. In the meanwhile, the political formation against the Communist Party has staked a claim to forming government saying that it has the support of 106 members in a parliament of 205.

All this has given rise to difficult constitutional problems in resolving which the King as the constitutional monarch will have a decisive voice, to say the least. In other words, it has gone out of the hands of Nepal's political parties. They must, therefore, learn to cooperate under trying circumstances so that democracy can take roots in that neighbouring country.

## Progress of Nations

The UNICEF's Progress of Nations report, 1995, has been highly laudatory of Bangladesh's achievements in the fields of child immunization, sanitation, safe drinking water supply, primary education enrollment and vitamin 'A' supplement distribution. The family planning success has also received a special mention. To the UNICEF representative in Dhaka Rolf C. Carriere who highlighted our success stories last week in a press briefing all we feel like saying is that part of the credit for what we have achieved certainly goes to his organisation which gave us a robust support in the sustenance of the programmes. UNICEF's leading light, Grant, who is no more, is remembered very fondly here for the special place Bangladesh enjoyed in his heart. The legacy continues.

That said, we cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that all uplift programmes in Bangladesh have to be strictly time-bound and precisely target-oriented because the population in this tiny land is predicted to double in thirty years.

Yes, at our levels of economic development and literacy coverage, we have done remarkably well in population control and immunization, compared with nations on a much higher plane of economic growth and education. But since we are virtually sitting on a population time-bomb — given the demographic momentum that cannot be curbed drastically in the near future — the reduction in number needs a greater acceleration to consolidate the gains from most other social mobilisation programmes. Our weak points are malnutrition among the children and the still huge drop-out at the primary education level. Let these be overcome by concerted efforts.

# US-Japan Trade Talks Failure

## Is America Losing its Economic Supremacy?

by A MM Shahabuddin

IS it the beginning or the end? This big question mark haunts the people's mind around the world as it is loaded with heavy potentials, both ways. America, proclaimed and recognised as the only superpower left in the world after the demise of the Soviet Union, finds itself in an economic quandary. It now confronts a new brave world emerging after the end of euphoria of US economic boom. To America, it is an up-side down of the old world of the post-war era. In this emerging renaissance, two new economic giants — Germany in Europe and Japan in Asia, have appeared as new competitors of America.

In fact, much water has flown down the rivers of Asia and Europe, during the last fifty years, when these two vanquished nations have built themselves up on solid economic and hi-tech foundation. While Germany has assumed the role of a driving force in Europe, and together with Europe, is a big challenge to the only superpower of the world, Japan in Asia is playing the same role. And Japan has made tremendous inroads in America, trading mainly in cars and electronics.

### US Trade Imbalance

During the last twenty months or so, America has carried a relentless campaign to bully Japan to accept its proposals to reduce its trade imbalance which have been multiplying over the years, now reaching some \$66 billion dollars, 60 per cent of which is due to sale of Japanese cars in the USA. So America is hell-bent on forcing Japan, applying bullying tactics, to swallow its 'bitter pills' to

reduce its trade imbalance, if necessary by gate-crashing into Japan's home market to sell US-made cars and auto-parts. The last, and perhaps the decisive phase of this was enacted recently at Whistler, British Columbia in Canada, where trade ministers of the two countries had a long tussle, witnessed by, among others, the head of the 15-nation European Union (EU), Sir Leon Brittan. But the meeting failed to reach an amicable settlement as Japan refused to surrender to US trade terms. Meanwhile, President Clinton announced that Washington would take "strong action" against Japan if it continues to show its "recalcitrant" behaviour. The President's National Economic Council (NEC) is likely to go ahead to impose a tariff wall of up to 1000 per cent against Japan, targeting some one billion dollars worth of imports from Japan.

### Reaction to US Threats

As a reaction to US threats of punitive action, Japan has sent the signal of taking the whole issue to the newly-established world Trade Organization (WTO), whose verdict would be binding on both parties. Besides, Japan intends to take measures to counter US punitive action. In this tussle, the US seems to be losing ground as its European allies are not extending full support to this rather unethical "bullying behaviour" of America. They seem to be maintaining a safe distance from it. Sir Brittan, the head of the European Union, who attended the Whistler meeting has declared that "we are in

favour of opening markets, but we are not in favour of managed markets", thus clearly opposing US stance. So the US has been cornered and cold shouldered by the European countries in its trade offensive to ground Japan to achieve its end.

### Repercussions on Currency

Meanwhile, US-Japan trade talks had a wide-ranging repercussions on currency market. By mid-April, it so happened that American economy came "closure to collapse". By that time, the US dollar was sliding down precariously, creating a near-panic situation in money market. It fell to its all-time global low to 79.75 yen, lowest since currency-rate system was introduced in the forties. The US dollar has fallen 20 per cent against Japanese yen this year, thus helping Japan's economy to grow 20 per cent in terms of dollar. Thus when the US dollar was tethering from the cliff, President Clinton announced that Washington "would take little action to bolster the falling dollar. But why?"

The international traders believe that the US is "ready to accept a weaker dollar" as a means "to pressurise" Japan in its trade talks with America to accept the US terms for an agreement. It is, therefore, obvious that America was indirectly following an arms-twisting policy towards Japan, however unethical it might have been. The machination was clear: the message was direct for those who understand the signal. A higher yen compared to US dollar

makes Japanese exports more expensive, hence less competitive, thereby hitting Japan's export-oriented economy. But the machination didn't work well. Japan stood firm to thwart the US attempts to bully it.

### Replacing Dollar with Yen?

Some are of the opinion that Japan, as an ambitious nation, is thinking in a different way. Taking advantage of the "ailing" dollar, Japan wants to bolster its yen in world market, with the ambition of replacing dollar as international currency for transactions. Tokyo's main thrust for this is to match the country's "economic ascension", as they call it, and at the same time to counter the effects of falling dollar. There are, of course, many visible and invisible obstacles to block this ambition of Japan. The main reason being that the US dollar is now accepted as an "universal currency" for transactions purpose. But the fact is no doubt that due to its some inherent weaknesses, US dollar is showing its "decadence" and slowly losing its grip over world financial matters. And that's why the economic analysts think that "the dollar may eventually be knocked off its throne."

### Rot Began Long Ago

In fact, the rot had begun long ago and now it has gone down deep in its slide down the ladder, since the euphoria of the post-war period was over. At the end of the World War II the United States, enjoyed a booming economy in all respects. It produced half of the world's goods and ser-

VICES. But gradually, it started showing a steady down-ward trend. The economic recession of the thirties gave it the greatest shock. After 1950, the American economic growth rate fell behind that of many Western industrially developed countries, except the UK. Between 1950 and 1983, the US growth rate was 3.25 per cent, while France, Italy, the Western Germany and Japan grew at the rates of 4.24, 4.26, 4.63 and 7.87, respectively. So as an industrially up-and-coming nation, Japan had already taken the lead for the last three decades or so. And it so happened, that America instead of turning the table in its favour, had lost their economic supremacy in the mid-80s. America lost its lead mainly in the deployment of high-tech — largely to Japan, and in some fields to Europe, including Germany. During this period, American trade deficit rose enormously and Washington began to rely on foreign borrowing to finance much of its deficit budget.

### Yawning Deficit Budget

This yawning deficit budget continues even today to be the headache of the US Administration, and has much to contribute to dollar's weakness. The EU countries have already advised America to take measures to reduce this ever-increasing deficit budget, running into billions of dollars. Even the Republicans have now come up with their proposal to reduce the deficit by 12 billion dollars during the next seven years. In 1986, America became a debtor country for the first time since 1919. Japan has already replaced it as the world's leading creditor country. Asian countries alone owe a debt of over six billion dollars to Japan. So economically, America is already gasping for fresh impetus to stage a comeback on world's economic scene.

Judged in the above context, it is difficult to

imagine — now America would break the proverbial Gordian knot to effectively meet its competitors in Europe as well as Japan in Asia. A leading German banker, in a recent statement, in the *International Herald Tribune*, has opined that the dollar will not be able to rise against mark and yen until the US acts to boost domestic savings and cut its budget deficit.

### Two Vital Issues

Whatever punitive action America plans to take against Japan to gate-crash into its market, America should re-evaluate its economic strength and position in the present day world scenario, before taking the leap. It should, therefore, remember two vital issues. Although USA is the only superpower now left in the post-war world, but does it possess, besides its military strength, some more fundamental requisites to make it really an invincible superpower? Military strength alone can't make it a superpower, unless and until it acquires the matching economic and political power. That America is lacking in both of them has been shown on more than one occasion. Politically, America is practically at the mercy of its European allies. The European powers have flexed their muscle to America in its vacillating policy in Bosnia and Chechnya. They have cold-shouldered America in its latest move to stop sale of Russian nuclear technology to Iraq and also imposing of economic sanctions against Iraq. Even in its latest move to improve punitive action against Japan, the European powers are maintaining a safe distance. A superpower is recognised as a superpower only when it has all the inherent strength to pull the rest of its allies with it in all its plan of actions. It should be in the driving seat, not in the back-seat. And Europe in watching the shape of things to come.

The writer is a retired UN official.

# Serbs' Ethnic Cleansing in "End Phase"

Paul Hockenos writes from Banja Luka, Bosnia

Ethnic cleansing continues unabated in once multinational northern Bosnia. Although there is less physical violence in what observers call the "end phase," the aim is to force out the remaining pockets of Muslims and Croats who have called this region home for 1700 years.

ALONG the tree-lined King Peter I Street stray dogs sun themselves. Their former owners — Muslim and Croat residents — have long since fled this northern Bosnian city, the largest under Serbian control. In an eerie reminder of their owners' fate, the animals rest on the corner where the 400-year-old Ferhad Pasha Mosque once stood, before Serbian extremists blew it up two years ago.

The ethnic cleansing campaign continues unabated in this once multinational region of northern Bosnia. Where once half of the city's 140,000 residents were Muslims and Croats, today their numbers have dropped to 10,000 and every month there are fewer. The elegant Ferhad Pasha was one of 16 mosques in Banja Luka before the war broke out three years ago. Today, there is not a single mosque left in all of Serb-held Bosnia.

Observers call this the "end phase" of ethnic cleansing. "There is less physical violence" than in 1992-93, when Croats and Muslims were beaten up, fired from their jobs, turned out of their homes at gun point and killed, says Vladimir Curko, director of the UN refugee program in northern Bosnia. "But the pressure on minorities to leave is no less effective."

Muslims and Croats, for

example, are sent to the front lines as part of compulsory work crews. "Most civilians would rather leave the country than risk their lives like this, and the authorities know that," says Curko. The UN estimates that of the over 500,000 Muslims and Croats in northern Bosnia before the war, today there are less than 70,000 in Serb-held territory.

The city's Civil Migration Office processes the paper work and arranges transportation for evacuation. The mandatory price is 250 German marks per head, in hard currency.

An uneasy clam prevails over Banja Luka after the successful Croatian military offensive in Western Slavonia early in May, just 30 miles north of here. Heavily armed police, part of an extensive and feared force, stand at nearly every intersection.

The region's Catholic Croats have paid dearly for Croatia's victory. A week after the offensive, four more, Catholic churches were blown sky high, a priest and a nun killed.

"We have nothing to do with Croatia's policy or Western Slavonia," says Banja Luka's bishop Franjo Komarica. "But soon there will be no trace of a people that has lived here for 1700 years. The Serbs are accomplishing what neither the Huns nor the Avars, the Mongols nor the Tartars, the Turks nor the

communists managed to do."

Today those people preparing to leave Banja Luka gather at the far end of the outdoor market, where they offer their last possessions for sale. On old blankets, they display pots and pans, tools, window frames and doorknobs, anything they can carry with them. Six gypsy women, squatting in a circle, say they wanted to leave last week, but authorities closed the borders when fighting broke out in Western Slavonia.

Outwardly, Banja Luka, which never experienced fighting, appears prosperous. Even the houses that belonged to Muslims and Croats are mostly intact, unlike the ransacked Muslim villages outside the city. The houses' new occupants tack small blue-white-red Yugoslav flags on their doors. "This means that a Serb now lives there," explains Ljubica, a French teacher and child of a mixed Muslim-Serb marriage. "It shows they're proud of it."

Along the sparkling waters of the River Vrbas, the gray-white ruins of detonated mosques lie in toppled piles. "We old folks, we're the only Muslims left," says a withered peasant woman tending a small garden plot with a friend. "My sons, grandsons and now great grandsons are in Sweden, Croatia and Canada. I'm too old to leave. I'll die here one way or

another."

Today, there are fewer problems than before, she says. The police are more responsive when their houses are shot at, for example. As she speaks, a young blond-haired man rides by in a horse-drawn cart. The other woman raises her finger to her lips. "Quiet," she whispers. "Those young ones from the village, there's nothing they won't do."

The Serbs in Banja Luka show little remorse about the fate of their city. "Nobody wanted to see this happen," says Maria, 29, a mother of two. But why, she asks, were there 16 mosques, and only one Orthodox church? "It wasn't right to blow them all up, but perhaps 16 was too many."

Serbs and non-Serbs alike have notice a definite change in mood of late in the city. The nationalist euphoria that gripped Bosnian Serbs when the war broke out has waned. "Before, any word against President (Radovan) Karadzic was considered treason," explains Ljubica. "Today, everybody curses Karadzic and the war. But they only criticize the corruption and the shortages, not his political goals or ethnic cleansing. People here want to live in their Greater Serbia in peace and quiet."

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## The Man in Charge

I finally met the person in charge of US foreign policy in Bosnia. His name is Bob Miller, and he owns the Balkan Grill which is three jogging blocks from the White House.

"Every morning the President stops in for scrambled eggs while he is running, and I tell him what he should do," Miller told me.

"Which is?"  
"Remain tough, carry a big stick and tell the Serbs if they don't stop picking on UN peacekeepers the president will send Secretary of State Warren Christopher to Paris."

"That's pretty powerful," I admitted.  
Bob said, "I told the President that he has to supply weapons and ammunition to everyone in the area, but he must announce that he will not send American GIs to man Croatian foxholes."

"Why not?"  
"Because of CNN. You can't have American boys fighting around Sarajevo if it's going to be covered by CNN. The public would never stand for it."

"If we don't have our own troops in the field, what can we do to persuade the Serbs to release the UN hostages?"

"I advised the President that if they don't release them he should send Warren Christopher to Casablanca."

"What about American naval vessels?"  
"I urged the President to send two nuclear carriers to Dubrovnik and have our planes fly over Macedonia."

"Will that make the Serbs listen to reason?" I asked Bob.  
"We won't know until we try it. The President listens to everything I tell him. He even bought my idea of charging the Serbs with violations of the UN Charter, which meant that they would be banned from buying Marlboro cigarettes from the Free World."

"Does the President intend to send Larry King to see Sen. Dole if all other negotiations fail?"  
"Not now. He told me that if things don't pick up, he's going to ask Warren Christopher to see the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He wants Christopher to announce a second front from there as long as American troops are not involved."

Miller explained that the secret of Clinton's foreign policy is that he has one for even days of the week and one for odd. This keeps everyone involved in the Balkan theater off balance.  
"The President doesn't care how much his popularity falls in the polls as long as he can persuade people that he's doing the right thing."

"It sure sounds like it to me," I said. "But if it wasn't for you, I doubt that he could pull it off."  
"I don't want to take credit for everything," Miller told me. "But I did come up with the theory that the only way to win was to wage both an unconditional war and peace at the same time."

By arrangement with 1995, Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB.

## To the Editor...

### "Arabian Nights" on BTB

Sir, For the last four months, BTB has been screening a new series, the 'Arabian Nights' in Bangla every Friday at 8.30 pm. This absorbing programme portrays the obsession of an Arabian King who marries every day and then orders the execution of his newly wedded next morning as a measure to satisfy his whims for the infidelity of his first wife.

This creates chaos in the country and in order to save the lives of unfortunate

innocent women who are at the mercy of the revengeful king, the daughter of the Vizir, Sherezade, comes to their rescue and marries the King. She innovates and sets in motion a clever device — narrating a series of captivating, enchanting and bewitching eerie stories, weird fables and episodes every night until "morning prayers when she ends the part of the story at a very tantalising point, thus keeping the king in suspense to hear the remaining part of the story. The king stays her execution until he hears

the full story, which in actuality always ends at an engrossing point in a cyclic order and a new story crops up.

In fact, this programme which is very entertaining, amusing and glibly, with a dose of magic, sorcery, genii, giants, fairies etc, is very interesting and having no obscene scenes, a person can enjoy it with all member of the family. Unfortunately, however, this programme is telecast for only 20 minutes and is interspersed with numerous commercials which due to its abrupt ending affects

the tempo and rhythm of the story. It is therefore requested that the full episode be telecast — which lasts for 45 minutes, in place of 'Time Trax' at 9 pm on Wednesday or on Fridays as usual with adjustment of timing (9 pm to 9.45 pm) with other programmes.

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