

The East River Behemoth Takes a Wary Look at Cartagena

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Impact of Reforms

Having spent almost the entirety of the elected government's tenure on a series of macro-economic reform programmes, we are just about waking up now to the need for establishing a mechanism to evaluate their impact. Assuming that a 'reform policy evaluation system' comes into existence in a couple of months' time and starts reeling off vital statistics about the partially reformed economic institutions what practical gains could accrue from this at the fag-end of this government's tenure? For, none should be in the fools' paradise to expect that corrective measures could be in place, far less implemented, before the present government's term runs out.

Granted though, that the reform process being still 'incomplete' we shall have use for a dependable mechanism to evaluate the progress and impact of policy reforms.

One of the chief weaknesses to stalk the reform programmes has been the lack of bipartisan understanding on the contents and methods of their implementation. Secondly, we have shown an incurable tendency to be carried away by the laudatory remarks about the progress of reforms without learning from the critical references made by the donor community and local experts to where exactly the reform process was getting stuck.

On the questions of disinvestment of public sector units, labour retrenchment, their rehabilitation, maximisation of efficiency in a reduced and compact public sector, financial sector and company law reforms and, above all, law and order, the grossly missing factor has been the dearth of a national will to address them. The bureaucratic 'reservations' are the results of apprehensions that a spate in privatisation means a loss of power to officialdom. As long as they persist in this kind of thinking enabling environment would be a far cry.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman's fears about reforms being sacrificed at the altar of short-term political gains are shared by us. Even the 'half-done' reforms he so laments over risk being thrown out of gear should the political agitation continue and government of the day step up making populist commitments in an election year.

SOS from Narayanganj

The disturbing news has been coming from our border districts on the west for some time past. Now from even a Narayanganj house tubewell water has been found to be arsenic contaminated. The government must, without fail, look into the problem and take measures to effectively counter the threat.

In British India life expectancy of our people was 28. It has almost doubled in four decades' time. People are eating better? No. Earning better? Hardly. A result of better medicare? Very doubtful; for, a wider coverage by qualified physicians of the population improves the total health situation only marginally. Our gains in the life expectancy and related health parameters owe almost wholly to one factor: wider availability of pure drinking water.

The mainstay in our endeavour to ensure our people a healthful life and society, is tubewell and tap water, the latter again indeed being mined ground water. If this water can be contaminated, the health of the nation will be dangerously undermined by one fell stroke. And that is what has been happening in the border districts. Arsenic is poison for man and perhaps for all animal life. A rise in the level of arsenic generally occurring in ground water, for various reasons, can start its evil influence quite unobtrusively. But the Narayanganj sampling contained five times the amount of arsenic recommended by WHO as the limit of safety. In Kushtia too the contamination has exceeded this standard. In eight other districts there has been an alarming rise in the arsenic level.

In the West Bengal districts contiguous with our affected ones arsenic contamination is said to have started taking its toll. There, out of 86 lakh people affected, two lakh are already seriously suffering.

This is little less than an SOS. Please set up a high-powered commission of top scientists on the subject and let them mount a rectification campaign. An exchange of data must be started with West Bengal and a strategy evolved and, if need be, applied jointly.

Worse than Harrowing

To say it was harrowing is to say nothing. A local bully of Mohammadpur on Wednesday noon attacked a rickshaw carrying a couple and after beating up the husband chased the wife for her jewellery. The woman, fleeing for her life, entered a children's school then brimming with the tender ones. The headmistress, Nighat Begum came forward to stop the goon. The ruffian stabbed her. She started running, was stabbed again. The running and stabbing continued with a terrorised young crowd dazed and bewildered until the brave teacher fell. Taken to hospital she was given 37 stitches as the first thing to do.

It is reported Mohammadpur thana didn't even entertain the complaint, not to rush and catch the criminal and his cohort.

The culprit has been named and the criminal incident established. If the fellow goes about merrily mugging and is not restrained in a hajat — will the plea of some policemen being wicked and not all hold water?

The delay in effective response by Mohammadpur police is a matter meriting urgent action as much as does the crime itself.

In 1983 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India stated, 'I would not say what is pure, purer or impurer non-alignment'. In many ways the 1983 NAM summit at New Delhi was a turning point in the progressive march of the movement. The New Delhi Summit took place when the Cold War was still causing concern, albeit the US-Russian strategic arms negotiations were making substantial headway.

When Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru coined the term 'non-alignment' in a speech in Colombo on April 28, 1954, he himself was unsure about the long-term implication of the pre-occupation of the day. About 30 years on even his daughter was uncertain about the scope of the movement. The vagueness and indeterminate nature of the phraser led many people to compare NAM to the Holy Roman Empire which was neither holy, nor Roman, non an empire! Whereas the Indians and the Yugoslavs continued to put emphasis on the original principles of the movement, countries like Cuba and Vietnam bitterly attacked this position as 'revisionism' as late as 1981 in a booklet published by the ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hanoi. Who doesn't remember the Bandung get-together of the Afro-Asian leaders of 27 countries? SEATO and Baghdad Pact members like Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Thailand and the Philippines took part along with China (then a close Soviet ally) and Japan! While Bandung was greatly influenced by the principles of 'Panch Sheela' signed between India and China in April 54, the acerbic exchanges between the delegation of Pakistan striving to highlight dangers of communism and China, close friend of the Soviet Union, underlined, to a point, the philosophy of non-alignment: China, SEATO members and the Baghdad Pact members were carefully excluded from the first NAM Summit in Belgrade in 1961.

Since its inception with Marshall Tito, Jawaharlal Nehru and Gamal Abdel Nasser, the movement has principally been dominated by four issues: Middle East, apartheid, and Southern Africa; the Global Economy, Disarmament and Decolonization. On all these issues wittingly or unwittingly by the final documents the end of the summits ended up with clear tilt against the

United States. While many non-aligned leaders quoted profusely from George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, their conclusions at the end of the day were seen to be directed against the United States of America and other Western democracies in the backdrop of the Cold War confrontation between the US and the USSR! John Foster Dulles, therefore, thought the movement as non-alignment only against the US and dubbed it as 'immoral'.

The 11th Summit in Cartagena in Columbia takes place in the back ground of dramatic changes in the world. With the agreement between PLO and Israel, Israel & Jordan, and prospects of Palestine self-rule in West Bank and Gaza, a black president in the person of Nelson Mandela ruling South Africa, CTBT looking like a reality in 1996 and colonization becoming a distant dream, the movement almost looks like to have run out of issues to be put on the agenda.

Economic issues such as international trade, balance of payments, transfer of technology, Informatics would naturally therefore dominate present and future NAM Summits.

Bangladesh joined NAM at the Algiers Summit in 1973. It is interesting that from Algiers to New Delhi in 1983, over a span of exactly 10 years, the movement seemed to have undergone a sea-change. As a matter of fact, the Havana Summit in 1979 was almost a turning point in the history of the movement. If Havana showed the trend of increasingly moderating influence on the decision making process of the movement, New Delhi Summit consolidated this tendency. Moderate countries like Bangladesh, Yugoslavia, India, Sri Lanka, Peru did not like to be dubbed as pro-superpower. They also did not want the final document to be directed against any particular superpower. The Havana Summit, therefore, saw more reservations on the final document than any other Summit in its history.

While Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took the country to NAM membership at the Algiers Summit, President Ziaur Rahman led the Bangladesh delegation at

the Havana Summit. For Bangladesh Havana Summit was a significant event. Our activism brought Bangladesh the honour of being the spokesman for Asia at the Summit level. The team was ably guided by Foreign Minister Prof Shamsul Huq and Foreign Secretary SAMS Kibria. Although Marshall Tito was in frail health, his presence played a significant role in putting a leash on the runaway Cuban Foreign Minister Malmierca. President Saddam Hussein of Iraq, President Mengistu Haile Mariam of Ethiopia and Flight Lieut. Rawlings of Ghana drew particular attention because of the special circumstances in which they were catapulted to their positions prior to the Havana Summit! At this summit I had to pay back a special debt of gratitude to the delegation of the Philippines: in 1972 Ambassador Brilliant, as Chairman of Asia Group in Geneva, was instrumental in getting Bangladesh endorsed for the Asia Group membership in the face of stiff opposition of

ing sure that our vote counts.

Count them will. The present members with veto power is a direct outcome of the failure of the League of Nations. While the claims of Germany and Japan for permanent membership are based on new reality and rightly so, it will be a mistake to ignore another reality as demonstrated in Cartagena: Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Laxman Gama said it well when he wanted new criteria to be evolved so that Asia, Africa and Latin-America can also be represented as permanent members in the Security Council, and lend greater universality to the United Nations.

The Cartagena Summit may be yet another milestone in the progression of the movement. UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's emotional remarks at the Summit, the exchange of verbal pyrotechnics between India and Pakistan underscored the need for greater wisdom and realism in the NAM.

ENCHIRIDION

Waliur Rahman



six Muslim countries. Brilliant is travelled to Havana for seeking membership to the NAM. Then Director-General Faruq Sobhan and I negotiated the draft with Shushil Dube of India, Nihal Rodrigo of Sri Lanka, Hugo Palma of Peru, and Javed Murejnovich of former Yugoslavia, for smooth passage.

Following Havana the Delhi Summit was actually a turning point in the movement's history. It will be recalled that it was in Delhi, in October '74, that Henry Kissinger, for the first time, stated that "the United States recognized non-alignment and our relations with the non-aligned countries are another pillar of our foreign policy."

Concluding the 113-nation Summit, the Colombian President Ernesto Samper, who assumed the chairmanship of the NAM from President Suharto of Indonesia, said, "It is not enough that just our voices be heard. The UN reform must be aimed at mak-

ing sure that our vote counts."

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The world of 1945, and that of 1995, is not the same. With the demise of the Cold War and increased membership of the UN from 51 in 1945 to 185 today, the UN reforms are not only necessary for universality and greater democratization of

CORRIGENDUM

In the third line of the blurb in last week's column, "Re-inventing the United Nations..." the portion "...Victor Umbright told me in extreme reaction that..." should be read as "...Victor Umbright told me in extreme uncton that...". The same applies to the same portion inside the text. The inadvertent error is regretted.

To the Editor...

Living with in-laws

Sir, I am a regular reader of your daily. Few days back, I read an article written by one of your regular writers, i.e. Aasha Mehreen Amin. She has nicely depicted the whole picture of living with the in-laws. It is indeed a great problem with many housewives. But they cannot express their problems freely. So they silently tolerate everything for the sake of their children or her own personal interests. I think it would be better for both the bride and the in-laws if they could mutually sacrifice for the sake harmony. Nothing can be done without mutual understanding and sincerity. So let me convey my thanks to the writer for her good article.

Mrs Suraiya Habib
Zigatola, Dhaka

Fire hazard in garment industry

Sir, The Daily Star published a series of articles on fire hazard in the garment factories and other buildings or centres.

The objective is to create a general awareness among the public, and surely not as a tutorial to the highly trained professionals and experts whose duty is to implement the regulations (which need to be updated from time to time).

The prime defaulters are the regulating authority, and the industrial or commercial apex bodies (unions, associations) who are abetting the lapses in the guise of encouragement. This tendency is common in the developing environment.

We tend to be emotional and not strict. Strictness imposes two pre-conditions: presence of a principle; and the will to be disciplined.

Indirectly, the leaders are responsible, as they cannot discipline themselves, and misuse their power and/or influence. The leaders are not willing to suffer — they belabour their followers!

The crime of developing leadership! The fire will reach them.
A Husnain
Dhaka

Political vacuum

Sir, The leadership vacuum in Bangladesh has never been so acutely exposed as in the present state of political turmoil. The nation's emotional and economic vulnerability has been persistently being exploited by a group of totally inefficient and unscrupulous politicians. Must we admit that we are so utterly bereft of knowledgeable, efficient and dedicated leadership that we have no choice but to rally behind the purely sentimental banners of a national widow or a national orphan?

The recent successive hartals have proved beyond doubt that whatever these power-hungry leaders have planned out, it doesn't go beyond their personal interest and public welfare has nothing to do with it. Those in power have failed to safeguard the well-being, peace and dignity of the people, thereby leaving the public totally unprotected. In the meantime, the opposition leaders are showing a complete lack of control over their supporters, their major tools in the power struggle. In this state of affairs, when the economy, education, progress and social order are bleeding to death, a caricature of a president is sitting there, as ineffectual as ever and it seems we do not have one single leader in this country to come forward and try to restore sanity in this crises-ridden state.

What can this beleaguered nation expect from the future, when the present is so grim and without any hope? A Helpless Observer
Dhaka

Enough is enough

Sir, During the last one year and a half, we have had enough of hartals, street violence accompanied by threats and mudslinging at each other by the political parties. People are suffering silently and without complain but watching each move carefully.

Awami League's main forte is street agitation and hartals and usually accepts a solution after a hard bargain. The

other two minor parties such as JP and JI are only interested in fishing in troubled water and doing their best to aggravate the already depredated situation.

Being the party in power, we expect the BNP to take the initiative in resolving the political impasse. It will be an act of statesmanship by the Prime Minister for which people will be grateful. BNP should immediately announce the date for general elections and agree to a neutral caretaker government formed by a group of non-political persons.

Winning the next election is more important than competing each other by hurling threats and abuses. The BNP has nearly completed its 5-year term and given the country a stable government and withstood the undemocratic pressure from the opposition parties to yield to their demand. It has more to gain from a free and fair election in which the people will decide as to who was right.
Iskander Meah
Dhaka

"3 more items banned for import under PSI"

Sir, It was gratifying to note that the above item published in your daily on 8.10.95 received attention it deserved. National Board of Revenue (NBR) introduced the "Tariff Value" (TV) to solve problem of "under-invoicing". Or was it "honesty" of the importers? TV is not a correct system but under the circumstances it was the best that could be devised by the NBR.

The actual import prices always vary from the TV as prices in international market fluctuate. When the prices are less than TV, importers clamour for justice. But again when the prices are higher than TV, majority of the importers resort to under-invoicing to the level of TV by paying the difference direct to the suppliers. Thus competition becomes uneven and government loses revenue. NBR was pleased to issue the PSI (Pre-shipment

inspection) to satisfy the importers for prices below TV. But for the prices above TV nothing was done. So the honest importers kept on suffering because of under-invoicing by some.

If NBR is interested, there is a simple solution of the Tariff Value. Please charge all duties and taxes on TV alone irrespective of price movement for the period the TV is in force. All the importers suffer or benefit equally. The government may gain or lose revenue but this would be nominal in the total national context. As a measure of practicality, NBR should revise the TV from time to time. For this, NBR should strengthen its price monitoring wing and the importers should help them.

Would NBR please scratch the PSI and introduce the system suggested above? The honest importers will pray for the NBR authority. All importers will be on the same boat — competition will be even.

S S Bari
Kakrail, Dhaka

Curbing road accidents

Sir, One of the reasons of frequent road-accidents is the huge number of vehicles, small and big, plying on the roads and highways. It would be found that the number of coasters, mini- and micro-buses, baby-taxis, Mishuks has increased tremendously in the road transportation sector. But in a densely populated country like ours, small vehicles should not be encouraged to ply on roads as public transport. Instead, big buses, double-deckers, should be increased which will not only help in the transportation of more number of passengers at a time but will also decrease the number of vehicles on roads, thereby reducing the rate of road-accidents.

I think, the government should arrange to import wide-bodied buses both in public and private sectors.

M Zahidul Haque
Asstt Prof, BAI, Dhaka

of 'malign neglect' or 'malign intent' as Bhagwati has so succinctly dismissed but because of what the US Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick so beautifully summed up in January 1982. "There is a mysterious dialectic through which greater realism can lead us closer to the ideals that inspired this very human institution (UN)."

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

For Hire

"O! Inc. What can I do for you?" "I want a hot guest — something different — for my daughter's wedding. Do you have any prosecutors available?"

"I'm sorry — all our prosecutors are taken for a Halloween party in Malibu. Would you like to rent a DNA expert from New Jersey who found blood in the spare tire of the Bronco?"

"No, this is a high-class wedding, and I want to impress my guests. Could you get me Judge Ito to perform the ceremony?"

"He's not available. He's in the process of writing a book. I might suggest one of the defense attorneys. They are excellent witnesses, and if someone objects to the marriage they will gladly jump in and yell, 'Question irrelevant!'"

"How much would a defense lawyer cost?"

"Six hundred dollars an hour, but I assure you the bride and groom will never forget them."

"Who else is for hire?"

"Mark Fuhrman happens to be free that weekend."

"I'm not certain he would fit the bill. He might use a letter from the alphabet that would offend them."

"That is all we have for the weekend. Everyone who was involved with the case is either out on the lecture circuit, writing a book, developing a TV series or preparing to be on the Tom Brokaw show. If you want a juror for the weekend, the only one I could come up is an alternate. What we're dealing with is pure, unadulterated fame. No one has ever seen anything like it. Even the bailiff who swore in the witnesses has a six-figure contract with the Enquirer."

"What about Kato? Could we get him to be our best man?"

"I believe he is available. What else did you want him to do?"

"I thought during the cake-cutting ceremony he could tell us about the thump, thump, thump he heard in the night."

"I'll have to check with him. By the way, we are also representing the expert lawyers hired by all the networks to tell the public what was going on in the jury room. Our clients say they make wonderful guests and have agreed to contribute to our knowledge of the case."

"I'm afraid they're overexposed. Look, this is my only daughter's wedding, and I want to make it something special. What would it cost me to get the BIG GUY?"

"The man himself?"

"Throw out a figure — any figure."

"He's not doing weddings. He can fill Madison Square Garden right now. He's bigger than any rock star. Forget him, because I can't offer him at this time."

"Okay, I'll hire one prosecutor, one defense attorney and a glove expert. They can mingle with my guests, but they can't dance with them."

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OPINION

Krishna Menon

Salahuddin Akbar

I read Personality Profile in the Star Weekend Magazine (6 Oct. 95) by A K M Jalaluddin and got myself confused. I pondered for a while — who was really confused.

One would easily find in "The Rape of the Lock" that Alexander Pope's attitude towards Belinda, the protagonist, is ambivalent. But I felt myself baffled at Mr Jalaluddin's attitude towards Krishna Menon! I couldn't figure it out if his piece of writing was either in tune with eulogy or otherwise.

Krishna Menon was compared with George Bernard Shaw; termed as a formidable intellectual giant. Mr Jalaluddin quoted Lt Gen Kaul as saying that Krishna Menon was an encyclopaedia of knowledge — besides science and arts. Menon had "intimate knowledge of the intricacies of aircraft engines, armoured vehicles, submarines and wireless." Well, Menon once was a defence minister. Menon himself told Mr Jalaluddin that domestically he could carry on in his mother tongue Malayalam all right but he could not address public gatherings in any language other than English.

On the contrary, the only Indian who is believed to have encyclopaedic knowledge is Nirad C Chaudhuri whose accumulation of the bric-a-brac of knowledge has been acquired over years of study aided by a phenomenal memory. Nirad could write English language as it should be written — and as few living Englishmen could write. And Nirad is as Bengali as his Bengali accent and he knows more about his country, its history, literature, flora and fauna as well as those of other European countries than almost any of his compatriots. At a function in honour of Laxness, the Icelandic winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, Nirad lectured him on Icelandic literature.

The remarkable traits of Menon's disposition as highlighted by Mr Jalaluddin only

speak of Menon's idiosyncrasy which also calls for a series of anecdotes. With his appointment as the first High Commissioner for India in London, Menon confused candour with cheek and constantly reminded his staff and himself: "I'm the High Commissioner, you know!" After presenting his credentials to the President of Irish Republic, Menon, over a cup of tea, was asked by President Dr Douglas how India was doing since its independence. Menon, launched on a breathless narration of India's mineral wealth, her enormous potential, the first Five Year Plan, naming the hydro-electric projects in various parts of the country, and the millions of kilowatts of electricity they would be producing. He gave figures of export of raw material in precise tons and prices of half-finished manufacture in sterling and dollars. This went on at a rapid pace for a good ten minutes with the President listening patiently and smoking his pipe. Menon realized that he had been somewhat inept in utilizing a polite enquiry to lecture on Indian economics. To make up for the error he asked Dr Douglas, "And Mr President how is Ireland's economy doing? How are the exports? Do you have a favourable balance of trade?"

Dr Douglas got his opening and he slipped his rapier in with the deftness which only an Irishman could have deployed. "Mr Ambassador, we never have a favourable balance of trade," he drawled as he put his pipe away. "You see, we don't have very much to sell. Our exports, if you can call them by name, are invisible exports — dramatists, poets, writers and that sort of thing. Nothing you can calculate precisely in terms of money."

It is amusing to observe that a personality like President Douglas could have been as curious as Menon turned to A K M Jalaluddin — "Were you educated here or abroad?"