

# Towards a Culture of Peace

Interview of the Director General, UNESCO, Federico Mayor by Mahfuz Anam

Federico Mayor has been at the helm of Unesco now for nearly a decade. Taking over the organisation in 1987 when it was mired in controversy, the Spanish scientist tried to build a new consensus among Unesco Member-States on such issues as human rights, universality of cultures, education for all and press freedom. As we see it, his most celebrated project has been "The Culture of Peace". Through it Dr Mayor wants to replace the existing "culture of war" with a new culture which lays emphasis on harmony against disharmony, highlights the values that bind humanity instead of those that divide, and stress activities that construct rather than those that destroy.

It is with this positive ideology that Mayor has been able to remove nearly all of the controversy that almost engulfed Unesco at one stage, and build a solid consensus of Member-States behind the ideals of this UN body. So far his biggest disappointment has been the failure to bring US back to Unesco, which it left in 1984.

Dr Federico Mayor was recently in Bangladesh on a three-day visit, during which he talked at length with editor Mahfuz Anam on his successes and failures, and about his vision for Unesco in the 21st Century.

**Mahfuz Anam (MA), Editor of The Daily Star:** What is UNESCO's mission right at the moment as different from one decade ago?

**Federico Mayor (FM):** It's exactly the same mission as in 1945. We must keep memory of the reason why this United Nations system was founded. It was founded to say that we, the people of the world, have resolved to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war. And today we must spread this message to the people around the world because even the member-states of the UN sometimes do not realise that this is the mission, to build peace, to avoid conflict, to avoid violence and to avoid war. We see very often that the UN is a peace-keeping organisation. It is a humanitarian assistance organisation. But we are absolutely wrong, because we have seen the peace-keeping has been a failure. We have been unable to prevent war and now we must intervene. The people have been already fighting against each other and violence has been increased. Prisoners, refugees are the outcome of these conflicts of this century in which we have unfortunately been more impressed by the force and the imposition of pressure than dialogue and understanding.

The mission of UNESCO is expressed through education in the sense that education is to provide for each single person. The best thing is to save life because each human being is a wonder — a wonder biologically and socio-culturally. You can imagine that each child has the faculty of creation, of producing a wealth of expression, of discovery, of imagining, of dreaming and this is precisely

what education means.

**MA:** After 50 years or so of the existence of UNESCO, when you see the rebirth of ethnic cleansing in the heart of Europe, the 'centre of civilisation', you have racial elimination like in Burundi and Rwanda, rise of neo-nazism in Europe, you have these conflicts in other parts of the world. Obviously the mission is stronger, but do you feel that UNESCO has not succeeded as much as it should have?

**FM:** In the UN system, we can claim that we have avoided another world war because the foundation was the aftermath of the Second World War. We can say that this is true, that at least a major global conflict has been avoided.

You are very right to point out about Europe. The question arises, how do Europeans try to give lessons of peaceful living together to countries in Africa when they have initiated two world wars in this century? Therefore it is very clear that all these wars, genocides are not the result of freedom. These are the result of so many years under oppression or under colonial rule in which all these people have not learned to live all together. They were living in silence and they were living under oppression, but in their hearts, instead of developing appreciation of the other cultures and understanding of the other religions, they were fermenting all these feelings and sentiments of aggressiveness and of distrust of their neighbours and sometimes of the same people with whom they were living together.

And then there was the rule of one system, the Soviet system, that collapsed in 1989 because though it was based on equality, it had forgotten free-

dom. Now it is the opposite. We must be very careful because we are now based on freedom, but we have forgotten equality. The result can be the same. The disparities are growing. The gap between the haves and the have-nots is widening.

We must be careful. It is very nice to be based on freedom. This is the first article of UNESCO's Constitution. If there is one defender of freedom in the world, it is UNESCO. UNESCO must guarantee the freedom. We know that if there is no democracy, there is no freedom — full freedom and freedom of expression.

Freedom of the press is the first guarantee of a democratic system. Sometimes a ruler may say that there is the rule of law in the country, but the rule of the law also existed in the Stalin period, and also in Hitler's Germany. But this was unjust because there was no freedom of expression, because there was no freedom of the press. Therefore, freedom is a gate for all, but freedom with equality, freedom with solidarity — these are the principles, the democratic ideas in UNESCO's Constitution.

For me, UNESCO's Constitution is the most inspiring and enlightening text that we have in our contemporary history. I invite journalists and everyone to comment on the preface of the Constitution because it is a really inspiring text as it was drafted after a terrible war, a genocide, terrible violations of all human rights. At that moment, these people were really very inspired to tell us to be careful, that economic development is not sufficient, political development is not sufficient. There are so many parts of the world, including Europe, that are strictly based

on economic development.

**MA:** UNESCO was designed to be the grand meeting place of intellects of the world, the place of ideas, of grand human vision. Is it so?

**FM:** I sincerely think it is now. It is now a forum of all people, of cultures and of expression. It is the place in which 19 religions met two years ago and made the Declaration of Barcelona, the most important declaration of the religions. There was Dalai Lama, the Catholic Church. They were saying that there is no justification for violence.

Then there is the issue of human genetics. This is a very delicate issue and we have been dealing with this issue for six years. And at the end, we have produced a declaration on human genetics and this has been approved, also by the United States because I requested that the United States says that it is in favour of the declaration. The Catholic Church has also given its support.

Therefore my answer to your question is, yes. We have set up this international commission for education in the twenty-first century chaired by Mr Jacques Delors, the former President of the European Union. We have set up this commission with the UN on cultural development chaired by the former Secretary-General of the UN Mr Perez de Cuellar. They have produced excellent reports. Our creative diversity is the report on culture. And there is the excellent report on education by Mr Jacques Delors.

And we still have matters. One is higher education which, in my view, is a segment of education that needs in-depth reforms around the world. We must follow Article 26.1 of the Declaration of Human Rights that says that higher education must be based on merit — merit of the students and merit of the professors. I think that this can be a real revolution in the higher education space.

Another matter is science. Science, retrospectively and prospectively has very big items for the future. In my view, water is one of these very big problems.

There was the World Higher Education Conference in 1988 and there is to be the World Conference on Science in 1999. And now the remaining thing is a conference on communication and its implications in culture and in human behaviour. This is planned to take place in the year 2001. Therefore I think that, yes, UNESCO has been this kind of forum.

We have also conversations for the twenty-first century with the best philosophers of the world. We have developed this Department of Philosophy now in UNESCO with very important contributions by the most renowned and sometimes controversial personalities. Therefore, I think that this is our role.

**MA:** About the changing in the structure of the executive board, these were independent people before, now they are representatives of the government. Hasn't that changed the independence of the executive board?

**FM:** The answer is no, because all depends on the quality of human beings. When they were represented in their personal capacities, they were very good, they were mediocre and they were not very good. Now we have excellent and mediocre

persons. It is all in the human being. You can have structures, organizations. You can have a wonderful office of UNESCO, very big office, important and traditional, but this is nothing if you do not have a very good director, very good people. You see, traditional offices are giving more problems than solutions or sometimes for each solution they are unable to find the problem.

There are some new offices for people who are developing immense mobilisation. It is a matter of mobilisation. It is a matter of having the capacity for new partnerships because UNESCO is a message. UNESCO is not a matter of giving 300 thousand dollars. UNESCO sees if we can with one single word persuade one leader which can represent billions of dollars. Imagine the day in which the Prime Minister of India decided to say yes, in ten years we will have six per cent of the GNP diverted towards the education. At this moment, there are billions of dollars being mobilised.

Therefore we are mobilising. We need to be associated with you, the media. We do not want you to make the publicity of UNESCO, but of education. You must tell the people that education is the key for the future. And then, if we have the media, we can persuade the governments, the parliaments. You can imagine one single amendment in Brazil has made immense progress in investment in education.

Therefore my answer is: all depends on the talent of the people. All depends on their vision, on their mobilisation attitude, to take the best, for example, singers, poets, to reach to the heart of the people, to tell them, talk about non-violence. Now we have all these people that work for UNESCO, from the soccer player to famous singers who all help UNESCO.

**MA:** There is a feeling that now the world is more practical, as you said, more on economic growth. The world of idealism, the world of dreams has been replaced by the world of practical matters. Do you feel that?

**FM:** I understand and see the results. The results are that everywhere we have more poor in the world with this pragmatism. We have 18 per cent of the citizens of the world that enjoy 80 per cent of the wealth. We have people living in such conditions who develop in their heart frustrations, aggressiveness and violence. They are excluded from the good aspects of

life. But now we must tell them, no, you can hope because we, the utopians, are arriving and we are giving to you the insurance that we have the ideas to change the world. These ideas are not the ideas of the Director-General of UNESCO or the ideas of the Editor of The Daily Star. These are already in UNESCO's Constitution. These are our mandate. This was already seen at the end of the World War II that the only possibility is to come back to what is our capacity, to create, doing well.

Even Mr Clinton, the representative of this pragmatism, has said that the future is ours if we are able to invent it. We must re-invent the future. We cannot have these practicalities of this competition, this trade that is based on lying, because we are saying that our product is cheaper than yours, but at what price of dignity is it being produced? In some factories, in some companies, by women working 65 hours per week.

We must know to whom the resources of the country belong. Very often we are reading some statements concerning Africa saying that the people in Africa are corrupted, that they are unable to utilise their natural resources. These resources don't belong to them anymore. They belong to so many international, multinational holdings. To whom does the oil in Africa belong? To whom do the diamond mines and the gold mines belong? We must know the reality, then we can judge. We can tell the pragmatists, you have never changed anything.

The world today can change and we can reduce the gap. We can have culture of peace, as there is a culture of war, a culture of imposition, a culture of competitiveness, a culture of one against the other.

We can do this on one condition, that we recognise that what really matters is each human being, and not only the state or the nation, if we have a country where two per cent of the population is the owner of 20 per cent of the land, at that moment all the pragmatism falls down.

We must see the results. The result is extreme poverty. The result is pollution. We are paying the price of war. And now we must make a choice. Either we pay the war, as we have done until now, or we pay the peace.

It is said there is no money for the environment. There is no money for reduction of poverty.



Federico Mayor

There is no money to have a latrine and drinking water in all the schools of the world. There is no money for the children of the world. There is no money for the street children. But last year we spent 926 billion dollars in armament. Therefore, we cannot be told by the pragmatists, look, what a wonderful world. I am a scientist. I only witness the results.

**MA:** You have now been the UNESCO DG for 10 years. What would you say are some of your greatest successes in these 10 years?

**FM:** I think in my position today, I am also benefiting from the vision, the devotion, the work of all my predecessors, of all those who have been working sometimes in very anonymous places in UNESCO. They have done so much for UNESCO to keep alive this capacity of mobilisation.

My view is that the one very big success is that today all the UN systems, all the international organisations and all the members recognise that education is central. This is very clear. Ten years ago, the World Bank was not having Human Resources among the priorities for the Bank. It has been a radical change. Now you see what is said in the Social Development Summit in Copenhagen. Commitment No. 6: education is the key for the future. Beijing Conference on Women — education is vital. Rio de Janeiro Conference on Environment — education again. Cairo meeting for Population — education. I think that now it is clear. The world knows that education is the key for the future.

What I wish for the future? That we realise that peace is a precondition for the exercise of all the other human rights. The media could help, the parliaments could help to say, what have we done? We have discovered antibiotics, we

have made immense progress in surgery, we have done wonderful things in telecommunications. What is the result? The net result is that we have been killing each other, that we have paid the price through millions of young people that have given their lives. This is what we have done in the twentieth century.

Now let us pay the price of peace. Let us proclaim that violence has failed and peace is a prerequisite for a new world in which we can peacefully settle the differences we have. This is my wish. Peace should be considered, as education is already, a key for our future.

We have good news in the UN. The UN General Assembly has approved the programme towards the culture of peace as being one of the UN priorities and the year 2000 has been declared the International Year for a Culture of Peace. I think this is a good kind of signal. 'Shanti', 'shalom' or 'peace', is the key word for most of the religions. Let us now apply these to the beginning of the new century.

**MA:** Sir, is there anything that you feel frustrated about, that you have not been able to achieve in the last 10 years?

**FM:** Too many things!

**MA:** What is your message to the people of Bangladesh?

**FM:** That there is hope. That in the last few years they presented a favourable evolution of population growth, of investment in education and in human dignity. I think that now we must accelerate. The investment in education must grow. We must realise that first after the defence of our borders, is the defence of our dignity. I admire all those women and men who, in a very modest way, are contributing to the development and progress of their country.

**MA:** Thank you very much Mr Federico Mayor for your time.

— Transcribed by Probe

## The Property Market

by A Husnain

HIGH-COST (not low-cost) apartments and multistorey shopping centres are coming up faster in Dhaka and other major cities, than the market conditions can explain. Who are the customers, their background, income, and the ability to pay back the loans (HP instalments), and from where the investments funds are coming (private and loans)? Let us not forget the irony: Easy come, easy go.

Local review of the investment pattern is necessary after the fall out in the surplus real estate business in Hong Kong, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta. Judging from the doom predictions in the coming two to three years, the investments and returns will show an alarming turn down. The hedges are scarce. Like our DSE, once the slide starts, it may become uncontrollable. What our Think Tanks are thinking? Watching the shopping centres in Dhaka, some disturbing trends are noticeable: the lack of customers (mostly window shoppers and the younger generation looking for new trends, with lean purses), and the lack of purchasing power, and the paucity in the variety of goods on display. Those who buy abroad, will continue to do so in the global village.

Most of these entrepreneurs (with white or black money) are neither trained nor experienced, and there is a lot of imi-

tation of ideas revealing weakness in salesmanship and marketing techniques. Business activities are based on better service, better product at competitive price. A time might come soon when the fell-out will begin, as the economy or the market may not be able to sustain these shopping centres. Are we prepared with the options? The situation was different beside the crash of the Asian Tigers. The low-cost housing schemes are not attracting the public and the private sectors. Only areas of quick returns are looked for by the instant millionaires.

Fortunately there is an alternative market: convert the upper floors of the shopping complexes into office blocks; and shift the thousands of NGO and other offices and business establishments from the residential areas, to bring down the normal average residential house rent should be around 20 per cent of monthly income, as per international norms. The garment factories are looking for alternative sites. The authority may initiate a survey to get an idea of the projection five to 10 years hence. Plan and expand; not expand and worry. What is the long-term financial weather report?

The loan defaulter culture has well set in locally, and the administration will find it difficult to initiate a bulldozer op-

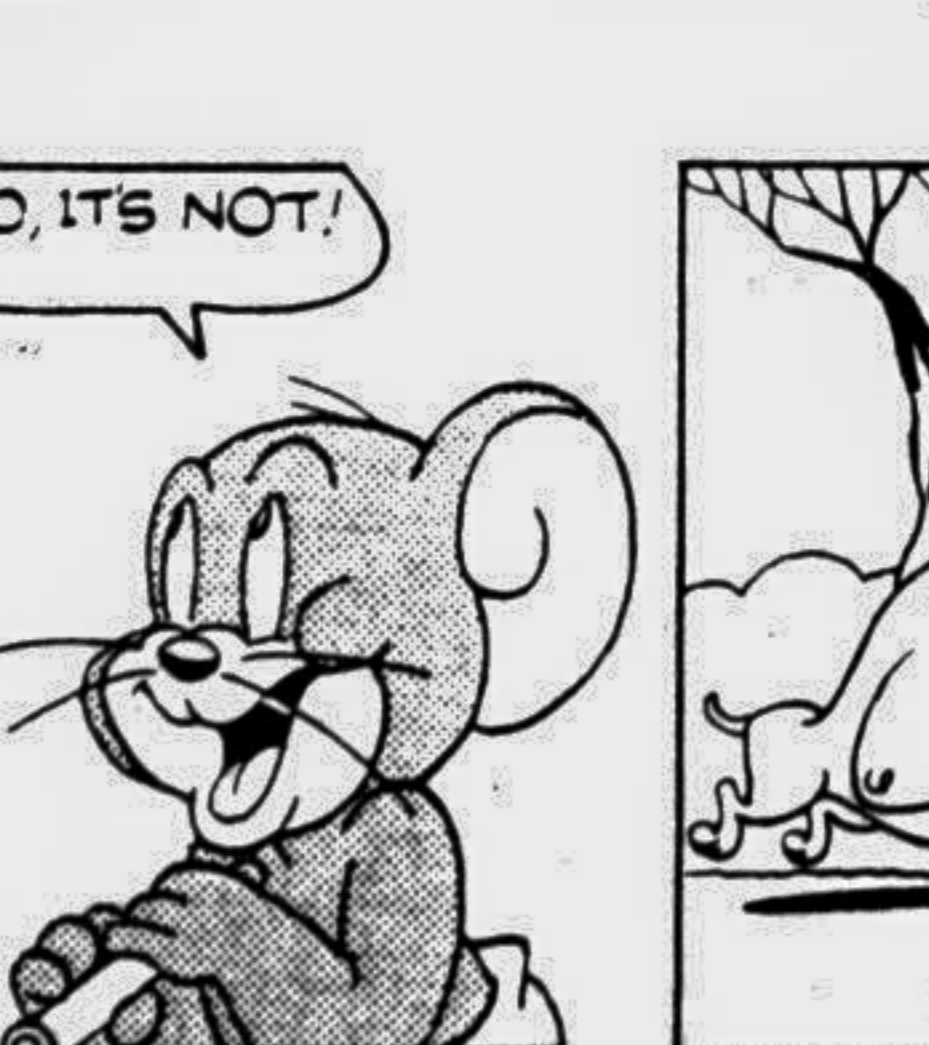
eration — the society may destabilise further (along with similar conditions in politics, anarchy at the bottom levels, corruption, and indiscipline).

As in Malaysia, the high-cost flats came up first. Note the contrast: Ringgit 600 pm rental for a double-storied bungalow, and MRS 4,000 pm for a luxury apartment. In the next phase the low-cost condos came up, with rentals around MRS 50 pm for a 2-room flat. Today the foreign exchange rate of the Ringgit has tumbled from 2.4 to 3.8, and there is a big devaluation in the stock market, forcing pay cuts and hard austerity measures.

Here in Dhaka, everything is in a fluid state: the administration, the politics, the money market, the banking sector, the stock exchange, the port, and the defaulter culture. The relevant monitoring quarters may start educating the public, so that corrective restraints could be introduced in time before greater damage is done, otherwise Bangladesh may slide down faster than Thailand.

Our curses do not seem to work (DSE, traffic, port, strikes/harsh). Ad hocism is going to cripple us, unless we learn from past and others' mistakes. There is a big hurdle to overcome, the bipolarity in our politics. Without political stability and basic consensus, we are stranded, worse than Robinson Crusoe.

## Garfield®



by Jim Davis

By Hanna-Barbera

The trial proceedings of Bangabandhu murder case resumed on Sunday after more than a month-long winter vacation of the court.

Prosecution witness-43 Prof Khurshed Alam, who made his deposition when the court was adjourned on November 26, was cross-examined today.

Following are the excerpts from his examination by advocate Gazi Zillur Rahman, state defence counsel for absconding accused Lt Col (dismissed) Khandaker Abdur Rashid:

**Q:** Are you now the president of Comilla district Awami League?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Who was the district Awami League president and general secretary during the incident?

**A:** I was the president then also. Abul Kalam Majumdar was the general secretary.

**Q:** You were the vice president of Swanirvar Andolon. Who was the president?

**A:** Abdul Momen, the then Food Minister.

**Q:** Was there any conflict between Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed and Kazi Zahirul Kaiyum, an influential Awami League leader in Comilla?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** And you supported Khandaker Mushtaque group.

**A:** No, I was an activist of Bangabandhu and his party's ideology. I do not belong to any group — not now nor then.

**Q:** Did Kazi Zahir participate in the meetings of Swanirvar Andolon?

**A:** Occasionally.

**Q:** Was Khandaker Abdur Rashid a student of you?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Did you love him?

**A:** As a student I loved him like others.

**Q:** Did you ever see his any unruly act during his student life?

**A:** No.

**Q:** The BARD is situated in your election constituency and you were an MP. Was your opinion sought while Mahbubul Alam Chashee was appointed a director of the BARD?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Did you inform any one that Khandaker Mushtaque was used to criticise Bangabandhu and his policies?

**A:** I informed Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. But he laughed it off and ignored Khandaker Mushtaque.

**Q:** You returned to Comilla on August 14. In fact, you were informed about the matter.

**A:** I was staying in Dhaka to take oath as a district governor. But I went back to Comilla receiving a telephone from my elderly father. I was not aware of the incident. If so, such tragic incident would not have happened. I would resist it.

**Q:** You congratulated Khandaker Mushtaque after he assumed the power.

**A:** This is not correct.

**Q:** Were all the governors who had come to Dhaka to take oath staying in the capital after the incident?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Did personnel from various departments come to the meetings of Swanirvar Andolon?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Did you, as the president of district Awami League and local MP, attend the meetings every time?

**A:** Yes, almost.

**Q:** This is not correct that Khandaker Mushtaque was a relative of Khandaker Abdur Rashid.

**A:** The y were relatives of each others.

**Q:** Army personnel did not attend the meetings of the Swanirvar Andolon.

**A:** Not at all the ordinary meetings.

**Q:** Rashid did not attend any meeting at the BARD.

**A:** This is not correct. He along with another army officer came to the BARD on the second day of Chittagong divisional meeting in late March, 1975. They met Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed at the rest house. I saw them sitting on the lounge.

**Q:** You have given false statement involving Rashid saheb in the interest of your party.

**A:** This is not correct.

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