

Democracy and Corruption

Those in the corridors of power must face up to their moral responsibility as well as the courage to do their fundamental duty to the nation to use their authority judiciously, otherwise they are as much culpable as those involved in the crime itself.

BECAUSE of the lack of accountability, totalitarian rule creates an ideal breeding ground for corruption even though the risks may be greater. Why is it then that democracy, whose touchstone is accountability, a prey to rampant corruption, particularly in the developing world? As the third world rid itself of colonialism, quite a number of the "free world's" leaders were military dictators/absolute monarchs who not only looted their country blind but revealed in it. The west mostly looked the other way, it being convenient to support them in the name of "democracy" and "freedom" in the fight against communism.

Money laundering, evasion of taxes, flight of capital, etc., very much frowned upon in the west, were all conveniently ignored. The 60s and early 70s saw leaders like the Shah of Iran, Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines, Suharto of Indonesia, Mobutu of Zaire, etc as the darlings of the west, the leading edge of the cold war. As this era wound down in the 80s, these leaders became embarrasments for their former mentors. Their riches were deposited in banks in places as diverse as Switzerland, Luxembourg, Cayman Islands, Isle of Man etc, their real estate holdings and other investments spread all across the world through a myriad network of dummy corporations, off-shore companies, front-men, etc. The developed world had accountability because of a free media, systematized documentation and public knowledge because of the high percentage of literacy. This accountability was denied to new found "democracies" where demagogues and so-called populists held sway, misusing their mandate to make financial bonanzas while making their future bright, in some cases attempting to also make their past bright. Among the worst cases at the present time are the Suharto's of Indonesia, everyone of the siblings is a billionaire in his/her own right while the country is bankrupt. However the Suharto's do not make such a pretense of democracy as do the leaders of South Asia. The Bofors scandal in India is an open and shut case against the late Rajiv Gandhi. One of the major reasons why Italian-born Sonia has abandoned her reclusive-like existence and stepped into poli-

tics is to have a nuisance value to keep the Bofors case-file from going public. The son of late Bangladesh President Gen Ziaur Rahman is a slur on the known honesty of his father while former President Lt Gen H M Ershad is still a democratic force despite the fact that it is widely believed, even by his supporters and friends, that he diverted millions in public money for his own private use.

Pakistan's great democratic hope, Ms Benazir Bhutto, has been discovered to be a loiterer-extraordinary, glib rhetorician and smart remarks notwithstanding, courtesy mostly of her incarcerated husband. Not only is the loot well-documented but thanks to an extraordinary effort by Senator Saifur Rahman and his lot, much in variance to his Mr Hyde personality, the foreign banks where some of the loot landed up have been detected and in many cases the accounts frozen. Brazen-faced the former PM had the gall to first deny their existence even, well knowing that she is not telling the truth. What is more extraordinary is that mature political leaders have fallen for her misleading spiel. If other leaders, even with little political standing, get in alliance with her it gives her credibility with the masses, such is the sham that goes for democracy in Pakistan.

The most potent symbol of that sham today, other than Ms Benazir and Madam Marcos, is Ms Jayalalitha who has become a lynchpin to the BJP Government's survival in India. According to well documented widely publicized articles in the print and electronic media, Jayalalitha spent the equivalent of almost US\$ 25 million on the extravagant wedding of an adopted son. For years the BJP has been attacking her for her known corruption but even in the presence of wide-ranging public knowledge about her corrupt activities, she almost swept her State and holds the balance of power with her 18 national seats. The same BJP leaders, despite their rhetoric

about honest government and righteousness about their principles, have prostrated themselves before this potent symbol of corruption, in their lust to acquire power in the Centre by fair means or foul.

No less an example of such false standards in democracy is the story of Imelda Marcos. A la Benazir Bhutto, quite a portion of her illegal wealth has been traced abroad, in Swiss banks and world-wide real estate holdings. This lady, ingeniously claims that the reason for her wealth is the discovery of a Japanese gold hoard by her husband dating back to the Second World War, she convinced

sense in a one-person one-vote process of democracy. Hundreds and hundreds of legislators are corrupt, criminal, inefficient, etc. — should we treat democracy as a game where we can accept illegality on their part if such people are elected by the gullibility of the masses? There has to be a fail-safe mechanism at the grassroots level to ensure that such people do not find a place in the democratic process. However, even the existing laws are never applied. Asif Zardari and Ms Benazir Bhutto had declared their illegal wealth before filing their candidacies, neglecting to mention in their declarations their illegal wealth abroad, and what about the missing information in their tax returns? Now that the proof about their bank accounts exists, why are they not being disqualified as parliamentarians for starters?

When PML (N) stalwarts were incarcerated in 1995, the common gossip was that they would not be proceeded against so that when the Bhutto/Zardari combine was out of power they would be similarly privileged, mutual reciprocity in a privileged exclusive club whose members specialize in looting the nation! These may just be rumours but the coincidence of the "hands off each other" policy is disturbing and a denouement of the democratic process as applicable in the third world. The question arises, should this farce be allowed to continue to the detriment of the nation?

Corruption has not been confined to political leaders and bureaucrats, there was a massive diversion of CIA funds meant for the Afghan War. Is anybody at the hierarchy level in the ISI answerable for the very visible wealth of people whose fathers could not afford new cars less than two decades ago? Did their fathers, very much like Marcos, also "find" a pot of "Japanese gold", maybe? Do not the leaders of this country, whether in politics, bureaucracy, judiciary or in uniform, etc have a moral responsibility to recover the looted money as well as ensuring that the scions of such people do not take advantage of a sham democracy to further enrich themselves and then fly away to greener pastures?

Today, this country is in the grip of a severe economic crisis because of decades of loot by unscrupulous leaders in the corridors of power must face up to their moral responsibility as well as the courage to do their fundamental duty to the nation to use their authority judiciously, otherwise they are as much culpable as those involved in the crime itself. Being in the corridors of power is a crime and our leaders through the broad public spectrum must have more determination to do their bounded duty or make way for those who will. This country will descend into anarchy, if the guilty are allowed to use the present sham democracy as a camouflage for their crimes. Accountability, in the hands of shameless tears is a farce, we are fooling ourselves with such a democracy. The moral obligation to the downtrodden and poverty stricken masses as well as to the existence of the nation transcends any meaningless piece of paper. What is the use of a Constitution that does not prevent the unscrupulous from looting the till, what use is that paper to a man whose children remain hungry, sick and uneducated as a result?

Migrant Workers from Developing Countries and Global Strategy

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

Migration is a humanitarian issue. It is an issue of 21st century. It has to be addressed through a sensible legal regime where both rich and poor countries would accommodate each other's interest in a prudent way for the peace, harmony and stability in the world.

SOME time ago Bangladesh Law Minister in Japan had drawn the attention of the unfortunate plight of Bangladesh migrant workers to the international community for its lawful remedy. In the backdrop of the Minister's statement, I would like to discuss this important human problem from the global perspective.

From time immemorial human beings have moved from one country to another for a number of reasons, such as adventure, escape from poverty or from religious or cultural persecution. In the 16th and 17th centuries people from Europe migrated to US, Latin America and Canada. During colonial rule, British nationals migrated in droves to Africa for better life and opportunities.

The gap between rich and poor countries is larger at the end of this century than it was in the beginning. There are still millions of people who live at a greater impoverishment in the third world than was common for the poor in the industrialised countries at the beginning of this century. This wealth gap is widening as the time goes by.

With modern communication, information revolution and economic liberalisation, the world has become a global village. People are now globally oriented and no country, big or small, can remain in isolation. The movement of people from one country to another became much easier than before. With the help of electronic media, the people of the third world are aware of the affluent living conditions and opportunities in the rich countries. It is natural when they find themselves unemployed, they migrate to look for work in rich countries.

Another fact is the proximity of some third world countries to the rich ones. The young people in northern Africa gravitate towards Europe across the Mediterranean sea — a very short distance. Mexico has common borders with US which pulls the Mexicans to cross over the borders to US without proper documents. It was reported that as a desperate measure, a few Mexicans dug a tunnel across the US border to migrate to that country.

There is an acute shortage of young labour force in the industrialised countries to undertake the jobs that are often categorised as "3-D" jobs — dangerous, demanding and dirty. The nationals of the rich countries would eschew such work. It is a natural phenomenon that the vacuum is filled in by the aged-old theory of supply and demand.

In the background of the above scenario, it is no wonder that nationals from the third world countries are moving across in large numbers to the richer countries in Europe, US, Canada and Australia and other countries.

Bangladesh is no exception. In foreign lands Bangladesh workers have proved their skill, reliability, industriousness and above all they are co-operative, tolerant and peaceful. They built up a good reputation as a work force.

A section of migrants from the third world countries (Bangladesh included) arrives at foreign countries without proper documentation for work

and they are categorised as "illegal" immigrants. They are exploited by the employers as they work without job security and always are under-paid. They are under constant threat of being deported from foreign lands. The working conditions under law are denied to them. The fundamental human rights as enshrined under 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights and the worker's rights under ILO conventions are flouted in their employment conditions. Their existence is tough and rough yet they endure it because of economic reasons.

The surprising thing is that no international organisations including the Commission of Human Rights appear to be concerned with the protection of human rights of the so-called illegal immigrants. They have been allowed to live without the "dignity and worth of the human person" (quoting from the preamble of the Declaration of Human Rights) in foreign lands just because they are not recognised as legal workers under the laws of the country although they contribute significantly to the economy of the country through their hard work and skill. In my view, it is a great hypocrisy on the part of the countries that are often loud in their criticism against the violation of human rights to keep silent on the intolerable situation faced by this category of people. No body wants to listen to them as they are regarded the flotsam of the society.

In my view, migration of people from third world countries is a serious issue of human rights. The UN Declaration of Human Rights (adopted on 10 December 1948) in Article 3 provides that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person". I would argue that where a person's life is in danger or insecure because of poverty that person has a right to migrate to another country. No one can argue that a person has a right to die in his/her own country.

The purpose of the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 was to address the one-off situation after the second world war. It was a reaction by Western governments to the post-war situation where the West had to contain Soviet expansion and influence. In that context they devised a legal regime to accept the East Europeans including Jews from the communist countries.

The definition of the term "refugee" would make this point clear. A refugee has been defined as a person who leaves his/her country "out of well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" (underline is mine). The Convention served well for such groups of people.

The provisions of the Convention are hopelessly inadequate to meet the situation of the new pattern of movement of people from one country to another. The movement or migration of people arises not only because of "well-founded fear of persecution" but also for other compelling reasons. For example, the people have to move to escape from situations, such as natural or man-made disasters (nuclear accidents), civil war, poverty and soaring population in third world countries. The

green house effect might result in migration of people when their island-countries would be engulfed by the sea-rise. If political or cultural persecution could be the legitimate reason for seeking shelter in foreign lands as refugees, it is unreasonable that the people cannot move to another country when they are faced with situations much more life-threatening than political or cultural persecution. It defies common sense and logic.

Denial of such people of taking shelter in another country, I would argue, would be in contravention of Article 3 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. Let me quote the lofty ideals of the Declaration: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." (Article 1). Does the international community translate this ideal into practice? The answer would be in the negative.

Rather we notice that the rich countries are turning their territory into formidable fortresses. They are tightening the immigration laws in such manner that very few nationals from third world countries are able to enter the countries. Furthermore there appears to be a latent or veiled racial discrimination underpinning the immigration laws. The rich countries look at the symptoms and not the root of the problem. They believe the strict laws of immigration would be able to stem the tide of the flow of persons from the third world countries. In my view the introduction of stringent immigration laws would be of no use in the long run and is considered to be a knee-jerk reaction to a complex humanitarian issue.

I would argue strongly that the issue of migration needs to be addressed in a cool headed way and globally in the same manner as the problem of environmental degradation is being dealt with. The truth of the matter is that issue of migration will not go away, rather it is likely to increase in the coming years because of the soaring growth of population in the third world.

The rich countries must accept that while their prosperity depends largely on the sale of their goods in the third world, they have a corresponding obligation to ensure that the nationals from the third world are not discriminated and denied entry into their territories. Free trade and free flow of electronic media are only one side of the coin and the other side being the freedom of travel for any person to find opportunities for better standards of life.

I would argue that two-pronged strategy needs to be developed by the international community to address the issue of migration. One is to replace the existing 1951 Refugee Convention under the auspices of the UN. The other is to provide the third world with massive aid and to take concrete actions to lift their economic growth by taking initiatives such as, easy and preferential access of goods to the external markets, writing off the debts and transfer of appropriate technology. Once the third world attains a certain level of prosperity, the flow of nationals from the third world would diminish.

Another fact is not to be ignored is that the people do not move from their home lands unless there are compelling reasons to do so. The migrants in foreign land face an alien culture and language. They live far away from their near and dear ones and the emotional strain from the separation is quite stressful and deep. They suffer silently in foreign lands when they grow old as they receive no support from their immediate extended family. If the people of the third world enjoy a good quality of life, it is less likely that they would wish to migrate to foreign countries. Migration is a humanitarian issue. It is an issue of 21st century. It has to be addressed through a sensible legal regime where both rich and poor countries would accommodate each other's interest in a prudent way for the peace, harmony and stability in the world.

The writer is former Ambassador of Bangladesh to UN in Geneva.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

only is the loot well-documented but thanks to an extraordinary effort by Senator Saifur Rahman and his lot, much in variance to his Mr Hyde personality, the foreign banks where some of the loot landed up have been detected and in many cases the accounts frozen. Brazen-faced the former PM had the gall to first deny their existence even, well knowing that she is not telling the truth. What is more extraordinary is that mature political leaders have fallen for her misleading spiel. If other leaders, even with little political standing, get in alliance with her it gives her credibility with the masses, such is the sham that goes for democracy in Pakistan.

The most potent symbol of that sham today, other than Ms Benazir and Madam Marcos, is Ms Jayalalitha who has become a lynchpin to the BJP Government's survival in India. According to well documented widely publicized articles in the print and electronic media, Jayalalitha spent the equivalent of almost US\$ 25 million on the extravagant wedding of an adopted son. For years the BJP has been attacking her for her known corruption but even in the presence of wide-ranging public knowledge about her corrupt activities, she almost swept her State and holds the balance of power with her 18 national seats. The same BJP leaders, despite their rhetoric

the Filipinos enough to win a seat for the Philippines Senate and is now a serious candidate for the Presidency of the Philippines, despite well documented proof of her corruption, including the very public recent return of US\$ 500 million plus to the Philippines from Swiss Banks. The public apathy, despite these well known cases of known corruption, is a sad reflection on the process of democracy. In the west, such people could not have survived politically, though one dare say it would have made no difference to their acceptability and lifestyle on the cocktail circuit which is full of white collar thieves who are bank defaulters, tax evaders, money-launderers, etc. However, why are we in the third world resigned to accept such corrupt leaders as players in the process of democracy, indeed why are we resigned to this "democracy"? In the western world, a free media and wide-ranging literary contributes to a form of check and balance, having this drawback in the developing world why should we allow corrupt leaders to bankrupt our fledgling nation because of the western concept of (and for) democracy, particularly when they themselves do not tolerate similar behaviour in their environment?

Madam Marcos, Benazir Bhutto, Jayalalitha, etc are only the tip of the iceberg where charisma overcomes better



Metropolitan

25,000 hectares of land of GK scheme comes under irrigation

Some 25,000 hectares of land under the Ganges-Kobadak (GK) scheme have come under irrigation coverage with the start of operations of the GK pump station for the current aus season, GK project officials said yesterday.

The GK pumps started supplying water to the project area on Saturday for cultivating aus crops this year. M Obaidur Rahman, director of the GK Project, told BSS yesterday.

Water Board officials said according to the scheme some 45,000 hectares are supposed to come under irrigation coverage in the lean season when three main and 12 other subsidiary pumps will supply water to the project areas.

"We are covering 25,000 hectares of land instead of 45,000 hectares this year as one of our major and four subsidiary pumps remained out of order," Rahman said.

Water Board officials in Dhaka said necessary measures are being taken to repair the pumps which they said need major overhauling.

The irrigation in the aus season was suspended due lack of water for more than four years until 1997 when the project resumed operation after the landmark Ganges Water Sharing Treaty with India.

Treaty officials said currently the water level at the Hardinge Bridge point is 5.38 metres against the minimum requirement of 4.7 metres for

the operation of the GK Irrigation Project.

"Even if the flow of water is doubled right now, the whole 45,000 hectares could not be taken under irrigation coverage this year because of the mechanical problem," one project official said.

The first (1955-1970) and second (1970-83) phases of the GK Irrigation Project were developed on the right bank of the Ganges to provide supplementary irrigation for aman rice on a net irrigable area of 125,000 hectares.

The project, bounded by the Ganges and Gorai rivers in northeast, the Mathabhangha in the west and the Nababanga in the south, currently is also used to irrigate and add high yielding variety aus rice in lean season (kharif-1), which also needs more water.

At present 80,000 hectares is being irrigated in the kharif-II season (mid July to November), while 45,000 hectares is irrigated during the kharif season (March to June).

Project officials said over its life, the project suffered from problems both at the implementation and operational stages with the major being the suspension of the irrigation activities in dry season for more than four years until 1997.

They said water use has been considerably higher than anticipated and "this has led to a reluctance to develop the full irrigable area".

UNDP launches mission for CHT

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched a mission yesterday in response to a government request for donor support underpinning the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord, says a press release.

After ten days of work in Dhaka, the mission will undertake extensive consultations with those directly involved and affected by the peace accord, including women's organisations and civil society groups.

The five-person mission is headed by Ali Haider Khan and includes an international expert in peace building. The mission will submit its report within six weeks from the date of commencement of its work, the release said.

The mandate of the mission is to provide guidelines for an immediate response, setting up of modalities needed for a decentralised and participatory planning process and for identifying medium to longer term development and peace building requirements. Immediate response could range from providing support for basic necessities and social amenities like supply of food and drinking water, repair of roads and physical infrastructures, supply of housing and construction materials, health care services and education.

The mission would further consult with the stakeholders on modalities for undertaking a more systematic and comprehensive assessment of longer-term development assistance through rapid appraisals, workshop and technical assessments.



Charles Stuart, Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, inaugurating the Australian Centre for Education at Gulshan yesterday.

SC to hear cases during vacation from Apr 6-12

Hearing of different cases of the Appellate Division during the government holidays, including the Eid vacation, will be held from April 6 to 12, reports UNB.

Justice Bimolendu Bikash Roy Chowdhury will take up the cases for hearing at the court chamber from 10 am to 11 am everyday, said an official handout.

Zaker Manzil peer to offer Eid prayer in city

Peer Shaheb of Bishwa Zaker Manzil Hazrat Moulana Shah Sufi Khwaza Baba Faridpuri will offer his Eid-Ul-Azha prayers at Banani Chairman Bari ground in the city, reports BSS.

His two sons — Peerjald Al-haj Mahfuzul Haque Mozaddadi and Peerjald Alhaj Mostofa Amir Faridpuri — will also say their Eid prayers at the same ground.

DUTA shocked at death of Nurul Haq

Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) yesterday expressed deep shock at the death of retired professor of Applied Chemistry and Chemical Technology Department of the university and language movement veteran Nurul Haq, reports BSS.

Prof Haq died of old age ailments at the IPGMR in the city on Thursday at the age of 76.

DUTA president Prof AFM Yusuf Haider and general secretary Prof Mohammad Hossain Mansur in a statement described the death of Haq as a great loss for the nations as well as the university and prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul.

They also conveyed their sympathy to the members of the bereaved family.

Clinton's Tour of Africa is a Diversionary Tactic

Perhaps his visit to this unfortunate country will help heal the rift between the elegant African tribes provided it is backed by substantial financial assistance for their resettlement.

PROBLEM-RIDDEN yet generally popular President Clinton needed a foreign pollscore after the Iraq fiasco when the US was outmanoeuvred by the suave Kofi Annan who succeeded against all the odds in diffusing the Iraqi crisis and over which a war appears to have been finally avoided. Reports are coming in of Iraqi cooperation with the rejuvenated UN disarmament team which was given a new UN remit to treat the Iraqis humanely in implementation of the UN resolutions on sanctions and disarmament.

Deeply troubled by his multi-faced domestic problems, Clinton undertook an extensive African tour as a diversion from his ongoing never-ending investigations launched by the independent counsel initially on the first couple's involvement with the white-water case and subsequently by embarrassing sexual scandals.

Clinton's well-publicised itinerary, the first in the last 20 years since his Democratic predecessor, Jimmy Carter, included six African countries covering West, South and East Africa including Ghana, Uganda, South Africa, Botswana, Rwanda and Senegal. His first stopover in his odyssey to Black Africa was Accra in Ghana where he was greeted by the largest gathering of his lifetime which clearly moved him and his wife Hilary deeply. Ghana's President Jerry Rawlings, although has recently legitimised his leadership through polls, had led a series of coups and countercoups to stay put in power.

Clinton preached the message of stable democracy here. Although he espoused the themes of good governance and democracy in Ghana, Clinton in resolved to addressing the other pressing issues facing the dark continent as well. Apart from the economic problems, the newly-independent countries of Africa have had a fare share of tribal, racial and ethnic problems which have hindered their economic progress. Following the demise of Soviet Union, the communist influence has waned from the majority of the Marxist-led newly independent African countries, but economic hardship, racial and tribal conflict and terrorism have torn the continent apart.

President Clinton will, however, spend the longest time of his African tour in South Africa, arriving in Cape Town on 25 March and then going on to Johannesburg on 28 March. In this part of Africa, his primary effort is to try and improve trade and in fact this message will be stressed for the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. The African leaders are determined to put back their recent failures and forge a new identity based on their independence and progressive thinking.

During Clinton's visit the historic injustice of the African slave trade and its effect on the African psyche could not have been missed. The African leaders have suggested that the only way America can make good is by increasing its trade and investment in Africa which in the long run will deliver economic emancipation to the poor masses of Africa. As a proof of American involvement in the welfare of Africa as a genuine partner, peace corps volunteers have begun to arrive who will aid in the mass education programmes.

Clinton will make a brief stopover in Kigali, Rwanda capital, the site of recent bitter clashes and genocide between the Eutus and Tutsis. Perhaps his visit to this unfortunate country will help heal the rift between the elegant African tribes provided it is backed by substantial financial assistance for their resettlement. That would be the legacy to Clinton's long Africa trip.