

## Arrest and Torture of Journalists Get Close Scrutiny

People attending a recent human-rights conference in Zimbabwe came face-to-face with the kind of abuses they want to see stopped. Gemini News Service reports that the arrest and torture of two journalists is drawing outrage worldwide.

Richard Bourne writes from Harare.

**R**ARELY has a human rights conference so rapidly found itself in the midst of a serious and unexpected case of abuse.

The occasion was even more remarkable because it happened in Harare, the Zimbabwe capital where Commonwealth leaders made the 1991 declaration that set their member states on the path to a new commitment for human rights, the rule of law, and just and accountable government.

When Dr Stan Mudenge, Zimbabwe Foreign Minister — and also the chairman of the Commonwealth ministerial group set up to look at serious human rights crises — opened the conference he was greeted with boos, cries of "Shame", and a walkout by local activists.

The reason? Just that day Mark Chavanduka, editor of *The Standard* weekly paper, and Ray Choto a senior reporter appeared in court bearing tell-tale signs of torture. They had been subjected to electric shock treatment, beating and "the submarine" — where your head is put in a plastic bag under water until you think you will suffocate, and then your head is brought above the water for a gasp of air before the process is repeated.

Defence Minister Moven Enock Mahachi, whose military police were believed responsible for the torture of the journalists, announced rather coolly that they appeared to be injured "because they had scratched themselves."

The conference was funded by the Canadian and British governments, whose high commissioners stood by as Mudenge completely ignored the issue of torture. He launched into a stinging attack on what he called "elitist" human rights organisations, accused them of

ignoring issues of poverty and economic and social rights.

Conference delegates at once passed a resolution of outrage.

Attended by more than 100 people from 20 Commonwealth countries, the conference aimed to promote good practice in human rights, peace and good governance in Africa. It was organised by the Delhi-based Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), a coalition of non-governmental organisations.

The foreign visitors realised that they had stumbled on a human rights crisis when they also discovered that Isidore Zindoga, deputy secretary-general of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, had been beaten unconscious by three men. After six stiches to his head, he went to a police station to report the assault, and recognised one of his attackers as a police.

Eight delegates — including CHRI director Maja Daruwala and Shirley Mabuse, a South African human rights commissioner — headed to the Harare central police station when they heard that *The Standard*'s publisher, Clive Wilson, had also been arrested. They were not told where he was being detained. A few delegates remained behind after the conference formally ended to attend the magistrate's court where Wilson was due to appear on 25 January.

Peter Longworth, the British High Commissioner and former journalist, made a pointed reference to the need to avoid illegal violence during his remarks to the conference. He said a key objective of Britain's overseas missions is the support and promotion of human rights. He demanded confidence-building measures to restore Zimbabweans' faith in

freedom of expression and the independence of the judiciary.

The conference decided to establish networks bringing together Commonwealth-wide bodies, including the six which back the CHRI, with human rights NGOs to work on specific issues such as the right to information, human rights commissions, how to maintain human rights in the face of conflict, the right to information, police reform and constitution making.

Olisa Agbakoba, founder of the Civil Liberties Organisation in Nigeria, said that his group has made judges recognise the power of public litigation by inundating the courts with cases.

Public interest journalism — a journalism which investigated and crusaded — was credited with initiating the current wave of judicial activism in India by exposing the length of time prisoners in Bihar had been held awaiting trial. In one case this amounted to 32 years. Following a Supreme Court case, which ruled that no one should be held for longer than the length of sentence for the alleged offence, more than 40,000 prisoners were released all over India.

African organisations were particularly interested in the debate on constitution making. Groups in Nigeria and Kenya working for a new constitution in their countries drew inspiration from the experience of South Africa and Malawi. After exhaustive consultation and negotiation in South Africa, seven million pocket-sized copies of its new constitution were distributed in 11 national languages. In December, a pocket-sized plan for the promotion and protection of human rights was also distributed.

The CHRI has agreed to publish a position paper on constitution making in the

light of the discussion.

The conference decided to establish networks bringing together Commonwealth-wide bodies, including the six which back the CHRI, with human rights NGOs to work on specific issues such as the right to information, human rights commissions, how to maintain human rights in the face of conflict, the right to information, police reform and constitution making.

Delegates also said the CHRI should coordinate with the Durban-based organisation Action to ensure that the voice of human rights groups will be heard loudly and clearly during the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in South Africa in November.

In 1991, on the eve of the Commonwealth's Harare Declaration on human rights, NGOs from Commonwealth Africa held a pioneering conference supported by the CHRI. Some of those organisations were in Harare again this year.

While the situation in Zimbabwe itself shows that progress has been uneven, the latest gathering demonstrated that African NGOs have become much more sophisticated and knowledgeable about human rights.

Senator Margaret Reynolds, the Australian who chairs the CHRI's policy-making advisory commission, said another such conference will be held next year in the Asia-Pacific region. Once again the aim is to bring Commonwealth NGOs and grassroots human rights campaigners together for networking and advocacy.

The author was a journalist for 20 years before he became the first director of the non-governmental Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. He is currently co-director of the Commonwealth Values in Education Project at the University of London Institute of Education.

## Publicity of Development Activities

by Alif Zabr

*The return on the investment is critical in the private sector, where loss cannot be tolerated; but in the public sector, anonymity is a cloak discouraging the fixation of responsibility, and enforcement of punitive action against the defaulters or offenders.*

**T**HE news on 'achievements' of 'development' projects and activities are depicted in the mass media in different formats, from different sources. The general audience (at the public meetings), and the readers and the viewers are showered with bits and bytes of information and data, leaving them a bit confused of the general overall picture. All projects take off with a bang, most are completed, many go into successful operation, some limp along, and the rest lie dormant or die out. It happens in countries, but here the liability list is persistently longer. Where to stop, and where to start?

The negative information is not easily available publicly without investigative reporting, and the perennial use of committees and commissions. The former probing tool is new in application in Bangladesh; but judging from its recent introduction, investigative reporting is becoming popular and a useful public tool for criticism. The bodies at the receiving end must be made to react positively.

Many tubewells have to be repaired or replaced each year, and a large number are inoperable — why so many year after year? The health centres lack medicines and facilities. Public

services perform poorly — the proverbial bureaucratic delays. Corruption, nepotism and pilferage are rampant. A new bridge is sinking. The quality of work is never in the excellent category. These 'leakages' drain the national economy. The solutions are technical, and beyond the scope of this commentary, but known to the authorities.

Hundreds and thousands of shallow tube wells have been sunk, or resunk in current locations. Similar number of primary schools have been opened, and the number of health centres doubled, for example. The success stories are in similar vein, emphasizing the physical dimensions of the structure. What about the weaknesses?

The comes the headaches — the nagging problems of operation and maintenance. The first is visible, and the second is invisible. Both need several types of support environment. O & M studies are not publicised in depth in the media. The nuts and bolts have to be reviewed at the policy-making level for ironing out the weaknesses, and increase efficiency. There is marginal improvement after three decades. All studies have to be modular, for later integration.

The management must be smart. The latter include many factors, such as professionally trained and experienced teams: backed with the necessary facilities (it is a complex subject). Having a budget is not enough. It is generally found that development and project allocations cannot be utilised fully and properly every year in most cases. This is attributed to systematic loss. The latter have many components, which need not be elaborated here.

There are other angles of evaluation. The 'human factor' is very sensitive in the developing regimes — QC or quality control being the greatest bug in the system. Most of the weaknesses and faults could be traced to the quality of the human resources. The cynics point out to the classic story of seven blind men examining an elephant.

Hartal is a visible manifestation of the reaction due to internal frictions (and national ones at the political level). This sort of dissatisfaction is a general overall symptom which need not be elaborated too much when discussing project efficiency.

To improve efficiency in the public sector, the operation and maintenance (O & M) networks

have to be constantly monitored internally, and through external agencies professionally qualified, enjoying the required authority to implement remedial measures. This is in addition to the role played by the Controlling agencies and set-ups (it is similar to external auditing, or the job of the Ombudsman).

The civil service has long experience and expertise to undertake O & M and project works year after year in different departments. It has been established that even if sufficient funding were made available, the efficiency was still low.

The return on the investment is critical in the private sector, where loss cannot be tolerated; but in the public sector, anonymity is a cloak discouraging the fixation of responsibility, and enforcement of punitive action against the defaulters or offenders. The Administrative Reforms on Deregulation is still not taking off — for reasons which are obvious to those who know how things work inside.

This is quick review for general awareness of the 'outsiders', who are directly or indirectly affected, adversely or otherwise, through the services offered to the public.

## The Other Side of Chinese Brain Drain

Pushpa Adhikari writes from Beijing

**I**N the fifties and sixties, a popular Chinese slogan urged citizens to go to rural and frontier regions and places that needed talent. Today, that slogan may well be 'go to foreign countries, big companies and places offering high salaries'.

That is exactly what China's educated mass are doing, some to pursue studies overseas, others to land jobs increasingly hard to find at home.

This process has been going on since the introduction two decades ago of reform and opening-up policy by China's legendary leader Deng Xiaoping but is being heightened by economic and social forces unleashed by the transition from a centrally planned economy to one shaped more by market forces.

China's 'brain drain' is also being fuelled by a desire by many families to see their children succeed in modern professions, ranging from computer science to medicine and business.

In effect, parents have been encouraging their children, who were in cradle during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) to go abroad. For this, Chinese youth are ready to pay any price.

Going abroad is not new for Chinese elite. From Sun Yat Sen, the father of the nation of China, Deng Xiao Ping, the father of reform and opening up, and President Zhang of new ideas, all have studied abroad and said to have brought new ideas for China.

But majority of Chinese youth today want to go abroad not just for study, but for much more.

A 55-year-old woman, a mother of two grown-ups, says the situation has been changed dramatically among the youth and she is simply unable to understand it. During her youth, she recalls, she dreamed for going to foreign countries but not to study or stay permanently but just to see those places.

But now, Chinese who are educated or have enough money often want to go abroad if they get the chance. "But maybe it is because of the frustration at home," she concedes.

The "going abroad" movement of Chinese students has gone through three stages in history.

It began at the end of Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) when a number of Chinese were sent abroad to study industrial technology. The second stage lasted from the 1930s until 1945, when the people's republic was founded, and the third wave started after China adopted its reform policy which continues to this day.

This last police exposed Chinese youth, much more than their parents, to the western style of life, often through media.

Students specialising in computing, communications, machinery, electronics, building, economics, automobiles, finance, the English language and clinical medicine generally have no worries about finding any job upon graduation.

However, those studying basic theories, management science, agriculture and forestry have not been so much in demand in the last few years.

Li Tong, who graduated with a sociology degree from China's most prestigious university, Beijing University, five years ago, is still unemployed. He has

been trying to go abroad since then.

He says: "Once I get a chance to escape, I will never come back. Even if I come back, I will not get better job opportunities here."

The changing signals from the labour market stem from China's reform efforts, which put pressure on restructuring the economy and improving efficiency against the previous practice of pouring money into large, state-owned enterprises.

Due to this shift, the professionals that were previously the major recruiters of college graduates have currently become the main source of mass lay-offs.

College students also tend to have fewer opportunities to enter Communist Party and government offices and their affiliated institutions, as a result of programmes underway to streamline the bureaucracy.

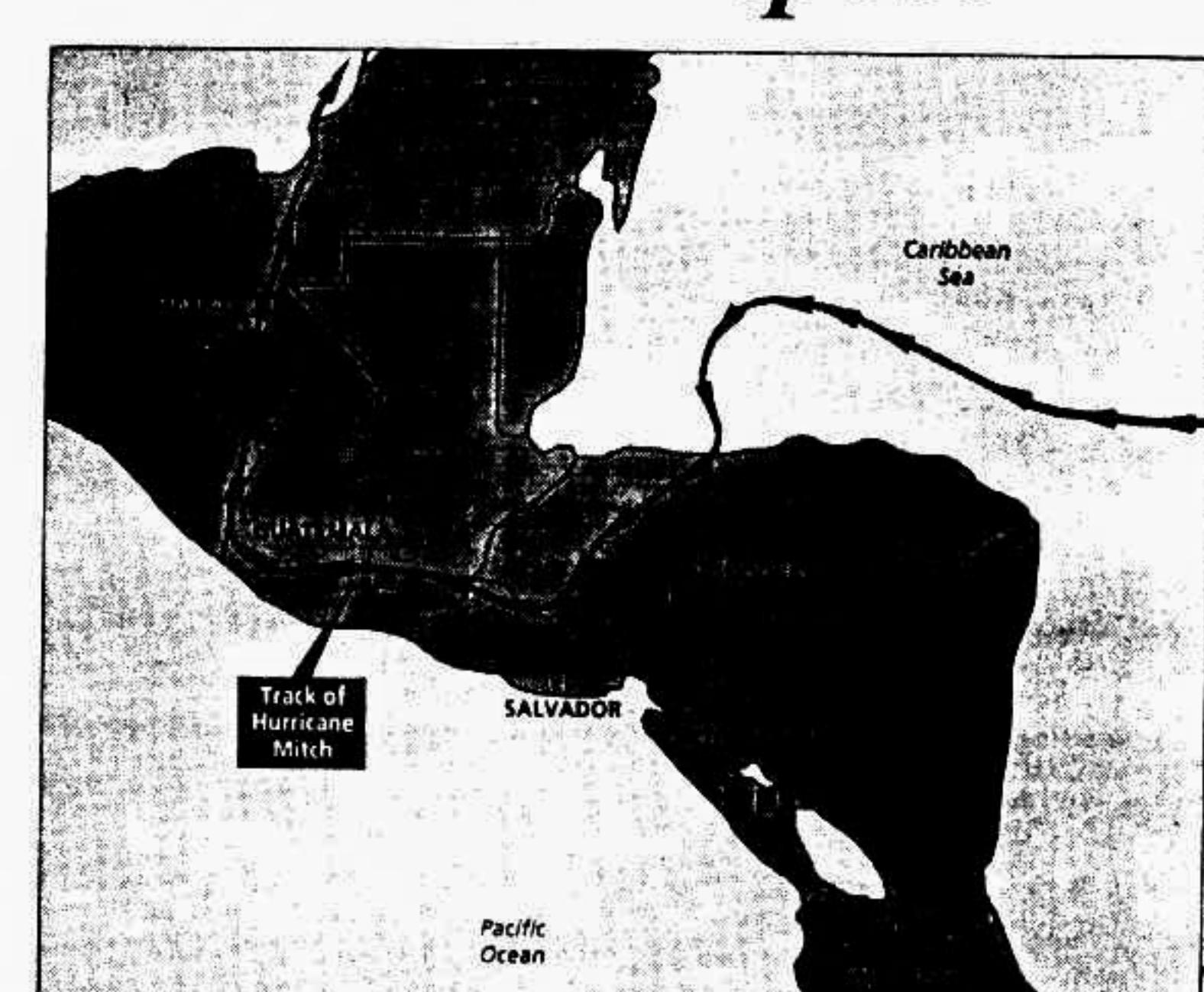
Reports from the State Statistics Bureau indicate that only 6 per cent of Chinese on the mainland have received higher education, but an increasing number of college students have found it difficult to obtain employment in recent years, compelling them to try to go abroad.

Students specialising in computing, communications, machinery, electronics, building, economics, automobiles, finance, the English language and clinical medicine generally have no worries about finding any job upon graduation.

However, those studying basic theories, management science, agriculture and forestry have not been so much in demand in the last few years.

Li Tong, who graduated with a sociology degree from China's most prestigious university, Beijing University, five years ago, is still unemployed. He has

## The Tempest



efforts.

The hurricane — the further the strongest even in the Atlantic basin — packed winds of nearly 300 kilometres an hour. But most of the damage was done by the downpour as Mitch dumped as much as 65 cm of rainfall in a single day, especially in areas where was very little or no vegetation, mainly due to deforestation, thereby triggering floods and mudslides.

Clear-cutting logging, hillside farms, and rampant housing development exacerbated mudslides and floods, according to experts. In Honduras alone, loggers and farmers have stripped away more than 9,000 hectares of forest cover every year.

In Nicaragua, the death count was between 1,800 to 2,400, most of them victims of the mudslide that was triggered when the slope of the Casitas volcano collapsed. Almost 500,000 homes were damaged and communication links broken.

Mitch literally declared war on the Central American nations. Landmines, buried during the region's many civil wars were violently relocated by the floods and consequent mudslides. Nicaragua has by far the maximum number of mines in Central America, an estimated 73,000. The information that mine-removal specialists had gathered about their location is of no use now. Moreover, the large amount of mud debris will hamper future mine-detection

Central America. In Honduras, for instance, about 54 per cent of the work force is employed in the agricultural sector. The storm destroyed as much as 70 per cent of the important crops in Honduras and Nicaragua, alone with most of the roads and bridges needed to carry the produce from the mountains to the markets.

Coffee and bananas — the two most important sources of export income for the two countries — were hit especially hard. Honduras lost one-fourth of its coffee plantations. Shrimp farms, citrus and sugarcane have been wiped out. Small farmers have lost everything.

Central American countries, of which Honduras and Nicaragua have a high share, account for nearly eight per cent of world coffee supplies, and their quality arabicas, favoured by American coffee drinkers, are exported largely to the US. But because Mitch's torrential rain damaged crops and washed away transport links, the future of coffee planters and traders looks bleak.

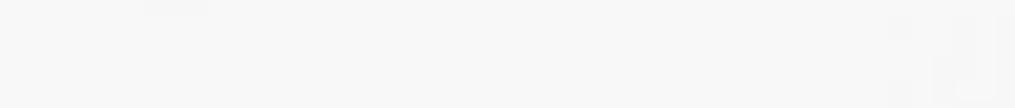
Mitch has also put thousands of people out of work. Agriculture accounts for a quarter of Honduras' Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs nearly two-thirds of the work force. In Nicaragua, it accounts for 15 per cent of output and employs more than 40 per cent of its work force.

The storm is over but it has left behind more problems to tend to besides floods and mudslides. Disease, starvation, accidents and landmines are raising the death toll.

Authorities fear an outbreak of cholera and other water-borne diseases. Thousands of bodies and sewage contaminating drinking water supplies have raised the spectre of epidemic. Morgues overwhelmed by the number of dead and bodies being buried in mass graves.

"We're surrounded by mud, waste and contaminated water", said Menecan de Manzana of the Honduran Red Cross. "This is going to cause epidemics."

## Garfield



by Jim Davis



SM



CSE/Down To Earth Features