

Dialogue with World Bank

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) on Sunday last held a highly interesting inter-face with World Bank Senior Vice-President and Chief Economist Joseph E Stiglitz. Not only was the theme "Policy Reforms: the Need for a New Consensus" superbly relevant in the present context of our relationship with the Bretton-Woods institutions, the deliberations also yielded a rich harvest of better understanding of each other's positions and some creative solutions to reform-related problems.

The State Minister for Planning Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir and former Chairman of WB Board of Directors and Finance Minister under BNP administration Saifur Rahman sounded critical of the role of World Bank and IMF at a time when these institutions themselves are undergoing a healthy phase of self-analysis and re-ordering of priorities. Mohiuddin Alamgir brought up a WB-IMF policy contradiction saying that while they insisted on reduction of subsidies by the developing countries they adopted a lenient attitude towards subsidies in agriculture being provided in the developed world itself. Similarly, we are called upon, to being down tariff levels but the same 'pressure' is not being exerted on the richer economies. Saifur Rahman complained that half of the credit given by the Bretton-Woods institutions went for 'loan purchase' which made them a 'party to corruption' in most Asian economies. He also thought it was 'illogical' that free movement of capital was allowed while free movement of labour opposed.

The visiting WB dignitary Professor Joseph E Stiglitz admitted that there was 'a high level of hypocrisy' in the preaching that comes from WB headquarters. Much as we appreciate the self-effacing remarks of his there are also certain observations he has made about us that cry out for attention. Indeed, if the poor can repay their loans, why must not the rich do so? That's how the wilful big loan defaulters should be obliged to reform themselves. Similarly, we need to take note of his pointer to internal credit flow straying into political rent-seeking activities rather than keeping to productive pursuits.

The Bretton-Woods institutions in their development financing approaches have been placing a high value on democracy, good governance and containment of corruption, agenda which ought to be the closest to our heart as well. As we strive to fulfil these goals for our own sake, we would like a cooperative relationship to develop with the World Bank based on transparency, openness, accountability and mutual respect.

Explosion at MP's House

Only days after Mohammad Nasim, the new home minister, took over, a bomb blast at the Chhata residence of a ruling party MP left two people killed and another critically injured. Fortunately, the Awami League legislator, Muhibur Rahman, was away, in the capital, attending the ongoing Jatiya Sangsad session. Rahman's family sources described the incident as an act of terrorism, saying that the bomb was either planted beforehand or hurled in from outside. People in the neighbourhood have their own story to tell, convinced that the victims were manufacturing explosives when one of those went off. If the latter version is found true through investigations then it will get the hackles further up.

In recent times, use of explosives in terrorist acts has alarmingly gone up. People like Sukkur Dewan, the rickshaw-puller who lost his right arm in a bomb attack during hartal, or Runa, the little girl whose wrist was blown off, have left poignant evidences of playing with human lives. In most cases, home-made explosives were used. Even worse, a couple of days back, some 40,000 crude bombs were recovered from a truck in Laksam, which, police suspect, had been smuggled into the country. Bottomline — more are coming or have already come. Combined with Monday's incident, the whole scenario represents more than only a deterioration of law and order situation, it portends a sinister ploy to destabilise the country.

With the macabre bomb attack on an Udichi Sangskritik Goshti function, which left eight killed, still fresh in our memory, Monday's incident comes, as a reminder that, perhaps, things are fast going out of hand, more so when it's a ruling party MP's house. Time has come for an orchestrated effort to trace out roots of terrorism and weed these out. It is no longer a question of gaining or losing political points, it is now a matter of national interest. Leaders, from both ruling and opposition ranks, must realise that before it is too late.

Better Format Next Time

Much has been said and written about the bonus points system for the first Asian Test championship. Although the experiment passed off successfully opening up a new vista for Test cricket in the subcontinent, Pakistan's exciting win over India in Calcutta followed by their drawn encounter at Lahore with Sri Lanka generated sweet-sour reactions from knowledgeable quarters. Except for the Calcutta Test, there was little that could be called spectacular about the matches barring of course, some brilliant individual achievements that went into the record books. The milestones were achieved by Tendulkar, Dravid, Jayawardene, Wasti, Ejaz, Inzamam, Srinath, Saqlain and Shoaib. But Wasim Akram's performance was unmatched. His two hat-tricks in successive Test matches against the top and bottom order of the same team within a span of eight days is unique in the 122-year annals of the game.

It was quite generous of maestro Sunil Gavaskar to defend Pakistan's right to choose their opponents in Lahore for the final at Dhaka, nonetheless the exhibition of Pakistani inaction against Sri Lanka was not only an eyesore but it was a clear case of depriving the paying spectators of high voltage cricket. This could be done because of the points formula. In fact it has turned the Tests into a 100-over bowling and 350 runs batting restricted to the first innings only. Why not allow the first innings lead formula for deciding a winner for the next round or calculate the net run rate to adjudge the victor? That way the team faring badly in the first innings will strive to make up in the second enlivening the proceedings to a great extent.

All said and done, we strongly feel that this championship should be held every two years to generate more interest in the game and to allow sub-continental cricketers more exposure and opportunity to improve their performances. This will be a tremendous opportunity also for forging brotherly ties between participating nations.

Severe Strains on Transatlantic Alliance

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

The Transatlantic Alliance appears to be based not only on geostrategic expedience but also on a coincidence of values. The phrase "to give is to have" applies to each of them. In other words, if the leaders of the West wish to establish peace in the world, they must be willing to give something up.

must abide by the decisions of the Geneva-based 133-member World Trade Organisation (WTO). Bangladesh is a member of WTO).

As a retaliatory measure the US raised 100 per cent tariffs effective from March 3 on a list of goods from the EU, such as French hand bags and cheese, German coffee makers, Italian ham and cheese, fetta cheese from Greece and British biscuits and sweaters. It appears that the US Administration is seeking to recoup the amount of money equal to the lost sales claimed by US-based banana companies which is estimated about \$520 million dollars.

The EU, on the other hand, maintains that the US has no right to impose unilaterally the punitive tariffs on European goods before the WTO had ruled on them. The EU argues that the US is violating the rules of WTO. EU Trade Minister Sir Leon Brittan of UK called the US action "unacceptable and unlawful". The EU says that politics is driving the US to the brink of a trade war with its biggest trade partner. It led the British Foreign Secretary and the US Secretary of State to discuss this issue during her

visit to London from Asia. However, the two parties agreed to provide more information to WTO for a decision at its emergency session commencing on 8 March.

The second issue is related to the acquittal of the US pilot who was responsible for 20 deaths in Italy. Italian politicians and people were outraged to learn that the US pilot Captain Richard Ashby had been acquitted by a US military jury in North Carolina on 5 March whose plane cut through a cable car in a ski resort near Cavalese in Italian Alps on 3 February last year, sending 20 passengers to death from 370 feet above the ground.

The Prime Minister of Italy Mr. Massimo D'Alema who was on a visit to the US was reported to be surprised with the verdict and said that the US Administration should identify and punish the culprits and he did not wish to comment on court verdicts. The adverse reaction in Italy has become a political issue for the Italian Prime Minister. Italians demanded that the pilot should be tried in Italy and the landing rights at Italian military bases be revoked. President Clinton, on a damage-control action, quickly

apologised to the members of the family of the deceased on behalf of the US and vowed to ensure that it would not occur in future.

The third issue related to the execution of a German citizen, Walter LeGrand (37) in the US. Germany condemned the execution on 4 March in Arizona of a German convicted murderer as a barbaric and criticised the US for ignoring international treaties, such as 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. Germany contends that Arizona state failed to advise LeGrand of his right to consular assistance at the trial. Arizona conceded violating the Vienna Convention but defended that LeGrand had the same rights accorded to any US citizen. Walter and his brother Karl (35) were guilty of murdering a Bank Manager in 1982. Karl was executed earlier on 24 February.

Germany asked the World Court to intervene and both its Foreign Minister and the German Chancellor requested to stop the execution. The World Court which has no enforcement powers urged the US Administration to use all measures at its disposal to prevent the execution. However the Gov-

ernor of Arizona Jane Hull rejected the appeals and went ahead with the execution. This issue has become a political embarrassment for the new Chancellor of Germany, Gerhard Schröder.

The fourth issue is the access to the EU's market, such as hormones in beef. American beef producers say that they are losing about \$240 million annually in sales because of Europe's ban on hormones in beef. The European people are wary of the implications on their health if they take beef strengthened with hormones. They contend that the genetically modified food has not been scientifically tested for long to arrive at a conclusion that they are not detrimental to health. The British Government recently had shelved for the time being its plan to introduce the genetically modified food in UK after an uproar among the public.

The last issue is the retaliatory measure by the US House of Representatives to ban flights of Europe's Concorde to the US for a ruling that would ban many older American jetliners from landing in Europe. US officials say that rule is designed

to boost sales of European aircraft engines.

These jitters in the relations between the two economic giants and alliances appear to give a wrong signal at a wrong time to others. For the West (the US and EU), there are many present day critical issues which need to be resolved jointly, such as the resumption of military inspection in Iraq, Serbia's agreement to the presence of NATO's troops in Kosovo, the implementation of 1995 Dayton Agreement in Bosnia, the financial crisis leading to the political instability in Russia and China's growing military strength in the Far East via a visit Taiwan.

The EU is united with the US not only by the ideals and practices of democracy but also by the practice of market economy and the contractual freedom of both consumers and producers and specially by the norms of human rights for the individual. The Transatlantic Alliance appears to be based not only on geostrategic expedience but also on a coincidence of values. The phrase "to give is to have" applies to each of them. In other words, if the leaders of the West wish to establish peace in the world, they must be willing to give something up. The sooner the leaders realise, the better it will be for the growth of the world economy and global security.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN in Europe, Geneva

Disturbed Donors, 'Baby-sitting' Politicians

The Jessore bombing appears to have only given the two sides another round of mud slinging, not the realisation of the gravity of such an unprecedented incident.

THE parents are angry with their disobedient children; after all they want to ensure their babies far well in facing economic challenges of the new century. They have hinted at cutting their pocket money unless they behaved.

They had hoped after the 1991 elections their children have learned enough from history and after all the sermons they got free of their 'personal' cost from newspapers, opinion polls and the parents themselves, the children would be obedient and stop being mischievous.

As I read the statement issued by 16 donor countries and agencies last week, I could not help recall the situation most of us faced when we were kids. I remember two cousins who were reprimanded for being so jealous of each other. Now they are married off to their chosen husbands. Thank God.

The major donors (parents), "deeply disturbed" by Bangladesh's political conflicts, have hinted at aid cuts unless the leadership (children) set their house in order, peacefully, analysts said, while Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad found that the statement was familiar to the government's mind.

They said the political bickering was slowing the pace of economy, scaring away foreign investors and hurting the poor.

The political situation along with other related issues would be "examined" at the April 19-20 Bangladesh Aid meeting in Paris and the statement urged "political differences to be resolved peacefully in forums like Parliament, not through hartals (strikes) and violent confrontation." (Hey children fight it out, if you have to, at home,

don't do it in public ... it embarrasses us.)

Bangladesh's development partners have a stake in the country's social and economic development," it said, adding "we are gravely concerned by the damage done to the nation by political intolerance, violence and intimidation." (Children listen, we spend so much to ensure good education and future for you, but we get concerned when you don't listen to us.)

Last year the donors pledged foreign aid (pocket money) to the tune of 1.6 billion US dollars. The statement came amid a conflict between the government and the opposition over the role of the country's election chief in a December by-election which the opposition lost, but refuses to accept the verdict sparking off two separate three-day (total six days) strikes killing 12 people and maiming many more.

The government says the general strikes cost the economy of the impoverished country four billion taka (83 million dollars) a day. The business community too were fed-up and have called for alternatives to strikes to save the economy from ruination and their leader told me that "you cannot really quantify the losses in figures ... it has many other sides."

Interviews with bomb-injured people at Dhaka Medical College Hospital were an eye-opener for me. The family of rickshawpuller Shukkur and others categorically said they had enough of the politicians.

"If we don't work how can we

eat ... why don't they leave us alone," said Shukkur, whose grisly bloodied bomb-put hand became the favourite political picture. His right hand was amputated. Thanks to meaningless politics.

Angry Shukkur, father of six children, said, "Unrest kills only the poor, not the leaders who call strikes and eat good food at home."

Rina Begum, wife of another bomb-injured rickshawpuller added: "We have no choice but to work ... why are the two politicians doing this to the poor," referring to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and opposition

street protests, he said and added, "All of us should be united to create a congenial political atmosphere."

However, the BNP said the situation that prompted donors to issue the statement was due to the government's "negative achievements". BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiya said in a statement that "the government is responsible for pushing the country towards a situation that worried the donor community."

"Donors are globally reducing their aid commitments and they want higher returns and greater impact where they put



In Fool's Paradise

by Nadeem Qadir

Bangladesh Nationalist Party chief Khaleeda Zia. "They must wait for their turn for elections, and this fight among them is not a fair thing," she said.

The donors' statement was sent to President Shahabuddin Ahmed, the Prime Minister and the opposition leader, before releasing to the press late Wednesday.

The donors have expressed their concern over the political situation which actually reflects our attitude," Foreign Minister Azad said in published comments soon after. The opposition should respond to the call of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to solve problems in parliament instead of through

their money," said Afsan Chowdhury, an editor with the weekly Dhaka Courier magazine. He added: "Political unrest is affecting aid utilisation and the donors wanted to make it clear that those in the pipeline may not come at all unless the violence-ridden politics stopped."

"Political instability in Bangladesh is inflicting a serious cost on the nation ... slows reform and seriously diminishes prospects for reducing poverty. It also adversely affects aid flows aimed at poverty alleviation," the statement said.

"It has slowed down the economy, disrupted the flow of

exports and prevented Bangladeshis from earning a livelihood for their families ... It exacerbates law and order problems. It discourages domestic and foreign investment," the statement added.

The donors said they were "deeply disturbed" by the increasing political confrontation and polarisation that was jeopardising prospects for economic growth and development, and the government must also ensure the neutrality of state power and fair access by those involved in politics to the media, including radio and television. "As we have made it clear on previous occasions, we are gravely concerned by the damage done to the nation by political intolerance, violence and intimidation."

One analyst close to Bangladesh's foreign policy matters, said "Peace is essential for development and those who are putting their money (forward) are definitely worried." On the donors' plan to "examine" the political situation, he said "read between the lines ... (it's) very indicative of aid cuts unless political peace is restored."

Chowdhury Rafiqul Abrar, of Dhaka University's international relations department, said, "With so much aid coming here the donors feel they have a leverage and want democracy to work, with politicians behaving properly." "Get your house in order or face aid cuts in the future, and that goes for both sides of the divide," was the message, he added.

The statement came from the World Bank, the Asian De-

velopment Bank, the United States, the European Union, Australia, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

Analysts believe that the opposition has brought upon everyone understanding that there was no political conflict, only the fight for power. Except for one paragraph, which the government since coming to office in 1996 has been trying to implement, the rest virtually went against the political leadership of the country, focusing on the opposition.

Except for party-owned newspapers, all other dailies also rejected opposition's stance in their anti-government campaign, while there has been repeated appeals that government "sincerely" initiate talks instead of giving what has been described by some quarters as only "lip-service."

The Jessore bombing appears to have only given the two sides another round of mud slinging, not the realisation of the gravity of such an unprecedented incident that left nine people dead so far -- people whose weapons were words, songs or instruments only.

However happy Minister Azad maybe over the donors' statement the fact remains you can't clap with one hand and time was fast running out to stop killing and maiming of innocent people as many fear the next victims could be the bickering parties themselves. Please pay heed to the fears and warnings for the sake of our "Golden Bengal" or else the parents will be so angry that they will abandon the disobedient children to fend for themselves.

Chief Election Commissioner - His Predicament

by Kazi Alaaddin Ahmed

From the track records Mr Abu Hena can legitimately claim to have been a good performer. The by-elections at Manikganj and Barisal preceded by the June 1996 general election could be a ready reckoner towards his credibility. The latest by-election at Pabna also added new feathers to his cap. In the first two by-elections BNP won and in the last they lost.

lessness. Whoever occupied this constitutional slot in the past could not retire without being slighted by the political party losing in the election. The failure of the district administration deputising for the Chief Election Commissioner in the conduct of election locally would inevitably turn out to be a vicarious responsibility of the Chief Election Commissioner. This is how the election commission in all the three countries in the subcontinent universally faces the music of the political band. The row is raised in the loser's camp rightly or wrongly. On such occasions the Chief of the Election Commission is put on an acid test. Even though there is provision for holding election tribunal to hear disputes it is invariably a lengthy process to be too discouraging for the plaintiff. However, the Chief

Election Commissioner has to bear the initial load of the complaint.

There are instances of personal vindictiveness and there are, too, examples of firm withstanding of such assaults where personality of the incumbent CEC is something that matters most. The last Chief Election Commissioner of India Mr T N Sessan can be cited as an example. His approach to things and to the activities of the political leaders and workers was something most outrageous at times. In order to prove his absolute impartiality he didn't even spare Central or State Ministers coming on his way violating election rules. Sometimes he seemed to have been overacting his role and responsibilities. He would not budge an inch from his own firm conviction, no matter how powerful the person or persons

seeking relaxation in the otherwise rigid enforcement of the rules. His much publicised feature of a hard nut unfortunately bounced on him, his reputation as a person of great integrity eventually made him a very controversial figure among the high-ups. Even then he tried to fulfil his positional responsibilities in spite of the surveillance of the power centre over the shoulders. But none could hold him responsible for being partisan or for patronising vote-rigging. He relinquished the post with a clean slate.

On the other hand, here in Bangladesh, the Chief Election Commissioners in the past could not display such guts as Mr T N Sessan of India could with impunity. Nay, with courage, firmness and determination. The very common allegation dished out by the unsuccessful party in the election that the CEC's role has not been non-partisan, cannot, in my opinion, be true. It is though true that the CEC being the top person in the whole election game, he has to be fully dependent upon the district administration, the DCs in particular acting as Returning Officers, in the conduct of election scheduled. The CEC ensures the organisation, works on the information he receives from the Deputy Commissioners, anticipates the potential trouble spots, directs law and order enforcing agencies to take adequate precautionary measures. In spite of all these some of the polling centres become disorderly affecting smooth casting of votes by the local voters. In fact, there is no fool-proof remedy for such an almost perpetual malady. Much of it can however be contained and security measures. Here, a comprehensive and objective plan is needed. And the CEC and the Election Commission would require full cooperation from the officials in the field.

The recently concluded municipal election has proved be-

yond doubt that given the good-will things can shape well to the satisfaction of the people at large. Casting of vote in most of the centres was peaceful. A very few places was in trouble and consequently voting there had to be stopped. This was, however, very insignificant and, in all fairness, would not discredit the Chief Election Commissioner Abu Hena.

And yet the combined opposition led by Begum Zia and her BNP, in its bid to pre-empt the holding of the municipal election, called for the fulfilment of a 4-point demand. On the agenda, resignation or removal of the Chief Election Commissioner Mr Abu Hena was number one. The opposition combine formally declared a boycott of the municipal election and even forewarned their respective partymen not to file nomination or to participate in the election. Such a non-party based election into a party-based one. But the order of the central high command was not heeded to in most of the cases and in the end many of them contested in the election, quite a few won and many lost. The 4-point demand apparently proved unrewarding.

Meantime and prior to actual polling CEC Mr Abu Hena did very firmly clarify his position. He seemed quite conscious that as an individual citizen he would not like to be himself a bone of contention between the position and the opposition. But he insisted upon the opposition political parties to be specific about the charges against him. Since nothing as such was forthcoming he had to devote himself fully to his constitutional responsibilities. The ultimate conduct of the election was reasonably successful, earning him a positive moral victory over his wily adversaries.

From the track records Mr Abu Hena can legitimately claim to have been a good performer. The by-elections at

Manikganj and Barisal preceded by the June 1996 general election could be a ready reckoner towards his credibility. The latest by-election at Pabna also added new feathers to his cap. In the first two by-elections BNP won and in the last they lost. They didn't though grudge their two successive victories they were unsatisfied with the number of votes which they claimed, could be more if there were no vote-rigging. And in the Pabna by-election they talked loudly of rigging but eventually could not substantiate their claim with the election tribunal so far. So, both in victory and defeat they had the self-same dissatisfaction.

Having thus sustained a shock from their own partymen who participated in the municipal election, defying their high command and paying no heed to the calls of murderous hartal, they are now poised to launch the 'oust the government' programme. In such a crucial juncture the BNP parliamentarian from Kishoreganj Major (ret'd.) Akhtaruzzaman has made a demand to remove Moudud Ahmed, Khondkar Mahbubuddin and Supreme Court Bar Association president from the standing committee of the party or else, he along with his supporters in the Kishoreganj District Committee would resign from BNP. We had stories about his resignation and the contradiction of BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan. An interesting dramatic sequence has commenced, the result is yet to be seen.

Pending the formal launching of the one point demand to oust the government, the 4-point demand where CEC Abu Hena's resignation or removal was on top, shall have prepared itself to die a natural death. The numerous deaths due to hartal will however have to be accounted for. The ensuing Upazila election before June 23, 1999 will conceivably reopen the issue when the perpetrators of hideous crime would again be on the dock.

The Chief Election Commissioner Mr Abu Hena shall have nothing to do with that excepting that he would be expected to, for his moral strength gained out of the fiasco, to fulfil his functional responsibilities.

To the Editor...

Bangladesh-America-Bangladesh

Sir, Recently I went to the DITF and visited a stall called Jordana. The sales persons at the shop were attracting customers by saying "win a lottery and go to USA". But only product worth Tk 100 condition to win the lottery. Unfortunately no item were available in the shop which cost Tk 100. A nail polish was priced at Tk 90 and a lipstick was Tk 45. This means one has to pay at least Tk 145/- to get a lottery ticket with products.

The sales incharge further stated that he visited USA 70 (seventy) times by such lottery tickets. When I asked him would they give the ticket without visa, he reacted in a harsh way and pointed out that the lottery owner would have to arrange a visa first and by showing visa he have to take the

ticket after winning. Were they making fool out of customers at the fair?

S M Sayeed
184, Bakshi Bazar Road
Dhaka

Thanks to AMM Shahabuddin

Sir, I think article (DS, March 12) "Are we not for Democracy? Or, is it not fit for us?" is a timely one. I want to thank Mr. A M M Shahabuddin for writing such a bold and strong article. But the question is: Is this type of article not read by the politicians of our country? If read, then are not they human being, or do they expect the people will make them learn why democracy is by harassing them publicly? They are making their interests shamelessly. Do they not see the miseries of the masses?

I fully agree with the comments and suggestions made in

this article. I expect such articles more frequently.

M A A Shoukat Chowdhury,
Edmonton, Canada.

Use them

Sir, The prime minister and some of her ministers are assuring people to build a healthy nation which will face the challenge of the 21st century. We all know that the PM and her colleagues are a small segment of the whole country. They came to power only to stay in power. But they are not proving themselves to be worthy enough to stay in power. The individuals who come through PSC are dynamic, brilliant and industrious.

The PM can use them instead of her not-worthy-enough colleagues in running the country.

Teeto
509/Zia Hall
DU