

The Daily Star

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Dhaka, Friday, July 16, 1999

At the Wrong End of Globalisation

After nearly a decade of economic globalisation the world seems to be worse off than before, both in material and spiritual terms. We do not read any element of irony in this predicament though, the reason being that the process had been launched without any proper vision of the negative human consequences it might lead to. Since no safeguards were taken against these, it is the inevitable that has obviously happened. This comes into sharp focus in the recently-released annual Human Development report of the UNDP.

The analysis highlighting the flipside of hurried, and by hindsight harried, globalisation says that it is making the rich richer and the poor poorer in almost every way. The widening gap between the rich and the poor is amply illustrated by the prevalent income ratio between the top five and the bottom five countries of the world. The ratio is now 70:1 as compared with 60:1 some nine years ago. The growing hiatus is making people 'fear for their jobs, their health, the survival of their culture and community, their environment and their personal safety', so warns the UNDP report implying thereby that globalisation acquire a human face before long to justify itself.

So, the experience is sufficiently compelling to require a re-writing of the rules of globalisation that have only encouraged the top few countries and powerful corporations to take advantage of the system while the rest seemed condemned to languish at the suffering end of the deal. And this polarisation between the advantaged and the disadvantaged is growing all the time accentuating in effect disparities within and between nations.

Monopolisation of the repository of knowledge and the centrally operated decision-making processes is at the root of the high incidence and perpetuation of poverty in the world. Cyberspace policing is a big joke, so that in terms of dissemination of information and access to exclusive materials, their interpretation, analysis and use it is the high-tech countries who are in command and call the shots. As a result, questions of ethics, equity and environmental balance are at a discount with profit-making considerations ruling the roost. Globalisation has practically meant a diverse range of often conflicting concerns being addressed all at a time. The list is long: drug-smuggling, money-laundering and other organised crimes, the police cooperation, the pop culture, the internet, the spread of epidemics, dumping of goods, and trade and business.

The thrusts of globalisation ought to be on equal access to the core of world knowledge and technology, the LDCs' participation in the crucial decision-making processes and a code of operations for the globe-girdling transnational corporations. A certain degree of acceptance of cultural, social and political ethos of different countries is also imperative for globalisation to be not rushed in any one of them exacting a heavy price in terms of socio-economic equilibrium.

The UNDP report particularly strikes a responsive chord in us where it calls for strong governance — a set of rules and institutions at every level — to make sure that 'globalisation works for people, not just for profits.' But we have to keep an eye on vested quarters that work in tandem.

LOCALISED struggle for women's rights, combined with western patronisation for the issue, has brought to light a very important component of democracy — empowerment of women. No political party chanting slogans of democracy can afford to ignore this, at least publicly. Awami League and BNP, two major political parties led by two most powerful ladies in the country, naturally are no exception.

But the two would be exposed to a major test in the coming session of parliament, as a Jatiya Party legislator, Rabia Bhuiyan — has come up with a private member's bill seeking constitutional amendment to reserve one-third of the 300 Jatiya Sangsad seats for women to be elected directly by people. The bill has also sought to make it mandatory for political parties to nominate one-third of their candidates from among women, essentially complementing the existing provision.

The proposed legislation has also sought one-third representation of women in the parliamentary standing bodies, the Cabinet, the Election Commission and the Public Service Commission. Besides, one-third of the judges at the Supreme Court would have to be women, the bill said.

The proposed law comes as logical sequel to the steps for ensuring one-third reserved quota for women at different local government bodies including Gram Parishad, Union Parishad, Upajila Parishad and City Corporation.

However, the bill, one has to admit, is the manifestation of aspirations of almost all the organisations in the country struggling for women's rights for years. Besides, the male citizens who believe that democracy is practically impossible without recognising women's equal participation in all spheres of social, cultural and political life would all be for the passage of the bill. Above all, the content of the proposed law is very much consistent with the spirit of Article 10 of the Constitution that says, 'steps shall be taken to ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life.'

Yet, anyone aware of the inherent limitations of the mainstream political parties has reasons to have doubt over the fate of the proposed law. Let us explain why.

Bangladesh — the affairs of the state of Bangladesh, to be precise — has been run by a couple of female politicians as Prime Ministers since 1991. Taking a serious look at the English version of the state's constitution any rational individual will be shocked to discover that it still does not prac-

Male Chauvinism in Female Leadership

Bill Seeks One-third JS Seats for Women

by Nurul Kabir

For those who really want the bill passed, it would perhaps be unwise to sit back and see whether Hasina and Khaleda can pass the test in the next session of parliament. Rather, they, especially women's rights organisations should immediately come out to drum up public support, lobby and demonstrate in favour of the bill. Because, such activities would help the country's female leadership, to a large extent, to get the better of their male-chauvinistic outlook, on the one hand, and ignore the possible opponents around them, on the other.

tically contemplate existence of a female MP, let alone minister or prime minister.

Defining qualification for being elected as a legislator, the Article 66 of the Constitution says, "A person shall, and to be, a member of Parliament if he is a citizen of Bangladesh and has attained the age of twenty-five years."

In the same vein, Article 67 says, "A member of Parliament shall vacate his seat....." or Article 57, saying, "the office of the Prime Minister shall become vacant - (a) if he (b) if he"

Same is the case with ministers, state ministers and deputy ministers. The English version of the Constitution does not

recognise even the possibility of existence of a female Speaker or Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Chief Justice or Judges of the Supreme Court, Chief Election Commissioner or Election Commissioners, and the Comptroller and Auditor General. Whenever a reference is made in these regards, the pronoun used is always masculine in both the Constitution and the JS Rules of Procedure.

However, the reality is that the BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia ran the state craft as Prime Minister for five years since 1991 and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina is running her government, since 1996 — thanks to the version in Bangla, a language that does not have gender-based pro-

nouns for a person (as 'he' and 'she' in English).

But the Bangla version of the JS Rules of Procedure also does not accommodate a female Leader/Deputy Leader of the House, or Leader/Deputy Leader of the Opposition. In Bangla, we have a feminine word for leader — netree. But the Rules are for the netas — masculine for leaders.

Begum Khaleda Zia or Sheikh Hasina have never been found uncomfortable with the nomenclature of their respective positions in parliament — either as the Leader of the House or the Leader of the Opposition.

There are still a lot of constitutional areas that need to be addressed from a genuine democratic point of view, in-

cluding various 'legal' discriminations against and injustice to female citizens. But the question at this moment is, why the English version of the Constitution, and both the versions of the JS Rules of Procedure have not yet been given a befitting look by conducting a 'small surgery' on the gender-biased pronouns and male-chauvinistic nomenclatures of the posts concerned, especially when the country's politics has largely been dominated by two 'powerful ladies' for more than a decade?

The answer is simple. Use of the gender-bias pronouns and/or nomenclatures can no way be attributed to any linguistic limitation of those who had originally drafted the

documents, or adopted them in parliament. Rather, the words in question manifest the inherent attitude — obviously patriarchal and male-chauvinistic — of those who framed the Constitution and formulated the Rules.

Those who framed the country's Constitution in the early seventies were all men. Grown up and educated in male-chauvinistic politico-cultural environments, their attitude was bound to be one that, at best, could patronise women instead of practically granting them equal status.

Although they incorporated a sub-clause in Article 28 of the constitution declaring that 'women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and of public life', the sub-conscious of the framers refused to use 'she' or 'her' — whenever reference of an MP, a Minister, Prime Minister, Speaker, Deputy Speaker and so on was necessary to make. The pronouns were not rewritten even after incorporation in the eighties of article 65(3), dealing with the time-bound 30 reserved seats for women to be elected indirectly, that says that the special provision shall 'not prevent a woman from being elected' to any of the 300 hundred general seats.

However, Hasina and Khaleda have inherited their respective political parties. But along with the parties, they unfortunately, have also inherited their predecessors' patriarchal, and therefore male-chauvinistic, political culture which is practically bound to be insensitive towards women's cause. One, therefore, can explain the two top ladies' silence over the male-chauvinistic characteristics of the Constitution and the Sangsad's Rules of Procedure.

It is not easy for anyone to overcome a culture s/he has lived in and nurtured for years. It would be more difficult for Hasina and Khaleda as they have additional difficulties of winning a number of male 'male-chauvinists' around them. And that is why both AL's and BNP's sense of democracy will be put to a major test by Rabia Bhuiyan's bill.

For those who really want the bill passed, it would perhaps be unwise to sit back and see whether Hasina and Khaleda can pass the test in the next session of parliament. Rather, they, especially women's rights organisations should immediately come out to drum up public support, lobby and demonstrate in favour of the bill. Because, such activities would help the country's female leadership, to a large extent, to get the better of their male-chauvinistic outlook, on the one hand, and ignore the possible opponents around them, on the other.

OPINION

Will Men Stop Eating Bread?

by Oru Mohiuddin

Why do men visit brothels in the first place? Probably because they will never be held responsible for their action! Is it only the women who will be rehabilitated and evicted?

THE basic principle of economics is: 'man needs bread.' Therefore men engage in the production of bread to satiate his appetite. Now the question remains if there had been no appetite would there be any production of bread? Maybe not. The same principle applies for the sex workers in the country. If there were no need for corporeal pleasure, would there be any brothels?

Today, suddenly there is a large hue and cry about rehabilitating the sex workers without a thorough plan. In the formulated policy, I am yet to find an answer for the existence of the sex workers in the first place. Maybe if there were no need for the service there would have been no sex workers. So why not focus on the consumers instead of the producers? Besides the flesh business amongst the lower strata of the

society is a by-product of our poor economy. Due to lack of income, hundreds of thousands are denied medical facilities and are subsequently dying due to various kinds of diseases, making their children orphans, who then are driven into the streets of the big cities, where the pimps trick the girl orphans into entering this profession. At other times, extreme poverty, resulting from being discarded by their husbands, compel women to do the same.

Once a woman is in the profession, it becomes a heritage for the subsequent generations since the daughters have to follow suit, as their social acceptability becomes null and void. Women, uneducated and helpless, are also trafficked into the business for a small amount of money.

Instead of finding a short-term solution to the problem through rehabilitation, the

government may want to take a look at the greater scenario. The government should take all measures to improve the economic condition of the country, primarily through encouraging the private sector and establishing a proper mechanism of income distribution that would improve the standard of living. Higher economic growth means more revenue for the government, which could allow a better social security system for the people. Amongst other facilities, this will enable the government to improve the quality of health and medical service, while at the same time allow a greater public access to the health services.

Subsequently the mortality rate of parents will decrease sparing girl children from the ensuing consequences. Higher income would also increase family stability and spare women from being discarded to enter the 'land' of so-called 'sin'. In addition, it will help instill better values into our children that would in turn reflect on our society. With improved economic system there would be better schools so that the children, especially the girls, have proper education to become empowered.

However, the most important question yet to be answered is that why is there such a large demand for the service? Why do men visit brothels in the first place? Probably because they will never be held responsible for their action! Is it only the women who will be rehabilitated and evicted? As I said earlier, if you want to stop the production of bread you must first kill the appetite or else there will always be bread in the market. One can only try to minimise the production, but it is only through certain steps such as improved economy.

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Guess Who was Disinvited from Dinner?

One would rather forego dinner than be guilty of sending the flower of our youth to their death without a justifiable return. Dinner invitations can wait; will time and tide wait for this nation with indifferent leadership that passes the buck instead of accepting responsibility?

FOR over 50 years we have been living a lie about an open secret. And this dual-faced policy has eroded our credibility to the point of extinction. On the one hand we very rightly say we fully support the just and indigenous struggle of the Kashmiris for freedom, on the other hand we mar its credibility by insisting that it is only moral support and no material help is involved. Since we are atrocious at duplicity and India is a past master at it, our holier-than-thou enemy has taken full advantage of the situation to focus this falsehood on full display to defame us in the eyes of the world. We definitely have a point about the world being callous about ignoring Indian atrocities in the part of Kashmir under occupation, an insipid media strategy formulated over the years in an amateurish fashion has contributed to our isolation in this regard, the low point being reached with the Kargil disaster.

The PM should have had the courage to come clean about Kargil. He was well briefed by the military high command in a presentation in GHQ about the necessity of jump-starting the process to uplift the morale of the Mujahideen who were engaged in a bloody struggle against overwhelming odds. GHQ re-hashed an old plan in an area that was virtually no-man's land, what the khakis probably failed to impress upon the PM was that the cutting off of the best part of two Indian divisions in Ladakh and Siachen would be a disaster whose magnitude would be unacceptable to the Indians. It would be surprising if the PM was not told of the possible escalation as one cannot believe that the General Staff had not war-gamed possible Indian responses.

The Army's greater priority to sending troops for meter-reading to WAPDA may be an indication that the hierarchy themselves under-estimated the Indian reaction. The

Kashmiri Mujahideen in Kargil were well befooled by Northern Light Infantry (NLI) troops backed up by Artillery Observation Posts (OPs) in the no-man's land since the Line of Control (LoC) in this area is neither demarcated nor delineated. Then we indulged in an exercise in self-glorification and made the cardinal mistake in accepting that Mujahideen were across the Line of Control (LoC). This blunder rebounded on us so badly that what was won on the battlefield with the blood of our young men has been subsequently lost in hard-talking on a negotiating table in a land far, far away. Our stance should have been clearly that 'yes, the Mujahideen have occupied dominant positions in no-man's land but our regular troops will ensure that they will not start anything unless they are attacked.'

The world would probably still have come down upon us like a ton of bricks but we would have retained our credibility and the downing of two Indian MiGs on our side of the LoC would have been difficult for the Indians to justify. Once caught muddying information we lost our credibility, thereafter the Indians had a field day in disseminating disinformation and misinformation. Quite literally, they went overboard. As is usual for Pakistan, everyone knows the truth but for the sake of the nation and the Army everything is discussed in hushed tones in private gatherings. Because of a misconceived notion about patriotism (and secrecy, if you please), nobody has the courage to speak up. And in doing so we demean the honour that our brave boys in Kargil brought for Pakistan with their blood. Make no mistake it was a bold and brilliant plan, where

in history has a composite group of between 1000 and 1500 men able not only to isolate more than two divisions but to tie down the best part of the Indian Infantry? The Indians had to bring in the best part of six infantry divisions, some from as far away as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) and Assam, virtually also denuding their two strike forces in the plains of Punjab and the Rajasthan desert.

Our boys accomplished a

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

virtual miracle, we should be proud of them instead of disowning them. Almost every Bofor gun of the Indian artillery was brought to bear, deploying along that small stretch of highway for only 65 Kms. Our boys took an immense pounding from the air and artillery, enough concentrated fire power to drive ordinary human beings mad, yet they took it and stood firm. In the face of mounting casualties and high rate of desertions, the Indians had no option but to mount a 'Bollywood' campaign complete with 'Tiger Hills.' The maximum they captured was a few measly ridges, these also only because of local defensive adjustments for tactical reasons once the Indians deployed their Agrabased Parachute brigade to probe possible openings in the defences of our composite force. Our boys have taken a tremendous toll of the Indians but because of the bankruptcy of the master political plan we cannot acknowledge their valour and sacrifice.

Once we had got caught in a credibility vise, the Indians exploited the situation for all it was worth. To cover the loss of morale, men and material of the Armed Forces

they went into over-drive with their war-hype. As bodies started to pour in they created an illusion that was virtually a re-creation of the NATO briefings for Kosovo and much earlier in the 80s, the British briefings with respect to the Falkland Islands. Regrettably we lost the media battle even before it started because we lacked professionals to handle our account and they did. The Americans love the underdog and if there ever was an underdog (other than Israel in their understanding of things) it was Pakistan, yet the Indians managed to turn the tables on us.

It is no use embellishing the truth by claiming that the PM did not know about Kargil. The PM should have known about the Kargil operation, if he was not clearly briefed about the extent or the consequences thereof, then he must take the blame as the chief executive of the state. His inner-circle should have the mechanism to define the geo-political circumstances as they would develop, while responsibility devolves upon him, it does not absolve responsibility from the shoulders of those who briefed him about their plans. As a civilian he would have limited knowledge of an unfolding military scenario, it should have been spelt out to him carefully in unambiguous terms in language that he understands. A lot of people have died, a lot of blood has been spilt, who will answer the lady from Jehlum who wrote an anguished letter lamenting about her son being sacrificed in vain?

Somebody has to have the courage to own up and accept responsibility. The PM should have taken that on his own shoulders, he would not have become any less a leader for it. Someone also has to have the courage to speak up in closed doors even at the risk of their careers, if not to the

peril of their lives, as per their oath of allegiance on commissioning. There is a commitment to the nation that should surpass loyalty to the individual and if those who are privileged to hold higher rank have lost this binding principle then they are failing in their basic responsibility to the men that they command and the nation they profess to serve. The unfortunate part is that today we have the best crop of generals that we have ever had in the army for the past 50 years. Yet a great battlefield victory was lost on the negotiating table even before it was fully fought out because we did not fully 'appreciate' the negative consequences. We won the battle and lost the war. It is believed that the COAS clearly told the Defence Cabinet Committee (DCC) that the Indians were bluffing, they did not have any resources to fight an offensive war. On the military side, everything was coming up roses. The Indians got a drubbing, they lost heavily in men and morale, their limitations were exposed and when they panicked they reached the bottom of the well. So why did we turn the other cheek?

Though it does take greater courage to avoid war than to engage in one, there has been inordinate damage to the morale of the nation and the Armed Forces that may well exceed the price of peace. We may have succeeded in internationalising the situation but at what cost? Yet the Indians survived all through their bluff and we lost out despite the fact that our men had carved out a major victory. A week or so ago I was disinvited from a dinner when my host-to-be took umbrage as to what had appeared in a newspaper column under my name. One would rather forego dinner than be guilty for sending the flower of our youth to their death without a justifiable return. Dinner invitations can wait; will time and tide wait for this nation with indifferent leadership that passes the buck instead of accepting responsibility?

Friday Mailbox

Air power

Sir, Comments and opinions have been expressed through the columns of The Daily Star regarding the procurement of MiG-29 aircrafts. The purchase was mentioned in the BBC and was commented upon by the government of the USA. Most of the comments have been about the procedure of procurement and whether Bangladesh could afford the cost. There is a need to examine the role of our force from technical and operational point of view; both tactical and strategic to understand the issue.

Both Yugoslavia and Iraq had the latest Russian aircrafts in their inventory. MiGs 21, 23, 25 and MiG 29. They also had networks of latest electronics, missiles, and anti-aircraft guns for air defence. When time for air battles came, their aircrafts could not even take off and those which did were knocked out of the sky within minutes. Their air defence system, aircrafts, missiles and radars were no match for the overwhelmingly superior western systems. Billions of dollars worth of machines were rendered useless when the time for reckoning came.

Due to our geographical location and the regional political scenario, the only external threat that we may envisage is from India. Threat from Myanmar is extremely remote. The Indian Air Force enjoys overwhelming superiority vis-a-vis the BAF. In a conflict, it is a foregone conclusion that the fate of the BAF will be the same as those of Iraqi and Yugoslav Air Forces. India's offensive electronic environment will totally deafen and blind our system. Concrete Bursting Bombs (Durandal) will pulverise the runways in Bangladesh at the onset of hostilities.

All Air Forces are extremely expensive. Only the developed countries, economically robust countries and those with lots of oil can afford the luxury. The basic aircraft is expensive and to keep it operational very expensive radar systems, guidance equipments, runways etc. are prerequisites. These equipments need to be continuously operated in a programmed manner for their operational readiness. This has a huge expense. For keeping the pilots ready for operation, their reflexes and instincts have to be honed through continuous training. This is very expensive. Lastly the cost of weapons and ammunition are also huge. A single air to air missile of the first generation type may cost \$ 100,000.00. Can our fighter pilots afford to fire a single one for practice? And without such minimum practice they can never be really prepared for their mission.

The expenditures for a functional and operational air force are really expensive which this country cannot afford at the present state of economy. Should we just procure a part of the system if we cannot have the whole operational system, buy the car body now, engine and wheels later? If we do not have effective Air Force, does it mean we are compromising our defence? The Americans with the best Air Force in the world had to concede defeat in Vietnam. The Vietcong had no Air Force. USSR with all their airpower had to quit Afghanistan, their adversary had the Chechen forces who had no airforce. Our own Mukti Bahini held out for nine months when the Pakistani Air Force dominated the sky.

The latest example is the way the fighters are holding out in Kargil despite round-the-clock air operation by the IAF for last forty-five days or so. The IAF is using best of the aircrafts and weapons available in the world including MiG-29s.

The lesson drawn from the examples is that even though our aggressor may dominate the skies it has to win many ground battles to defeat the defenders. And it is not possible to defeat a determined defender in his own country.

Brig Sharifuddin Ahmed (Retd)
New DOHS, Dhaka

War, upcoming?

Sir, I was astonished at the news that an under-developed country like Bangladesh is going to pur-

chase as many as 8 powerful fighter planes from Russia that are used specially in war. It is to be submitted a huge amount of Tk 575 crore to buy 8 'MiG-29s' which seems to be totally irrational in the context of our country. Here a question arises in my mind. Is the nation currently under any threat that an attack might be inflicted upon or the government planning to buy these fighter planes just to sustain status?

Arun Kumar Biswas
Dept. of English, DU.

Defence budget and defence purchase

Sir, At first when we heard our Finance Minister SAMS Kibria announced our national budget for the financial year 1999-2000 making second highest allocation amounting to Taka 2996.72 crore for our defence sector we considered the sum appropriate and justified.

But later on when we came to know about some alleged irregularities and corruption in the purchase of low quality MiG-29 from Russia, Ashok Kariya lorries from India and Navy frigates from South Korea we were disappointed and shocked. We are doubtful and suspicious about the ground and reason for colossal amount of defence budget allocation and we strongly demand of our people's elected government to hold a high level enquiry into the matter.

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Professional pollution

Sir, I agree in principle with the views and suggestions offered in the Opinion column of DS on July 7, 'Building Construction Codes', pointing out gross anomalies by architects and engineers and others in professional precepts and practices. Such violation of standard and internationally-accepted rules and regulations (codes) amounts to professional abatement, thereby polluting the various professional environment and culture.

This is easier to explain, judging by the standards of conduct set by our political leadership (regardless of party affiliation), who are wont to misuse power and influence. Many of the alleged accused parties or persons seek political shelter and patronisation when in trouble as owners of the new big buildings under construction, and the increasing number of opportunists bulldozing themselves as encroachers of land (the art of land grabbing).

The attraction for materialistic affluence overcomes the pangs of the conscience, resulting in compromises leading to dubious ethical standards, which spill over to other professions. The protests emanate from lower levels and evaporate at higher altitudes!

The professional bodies have to sit up and take notice and curb their truant members, or expel them, after due notice and processing. The black sheep must be exposed to the judgement of the society, and the escape routes have to be plugged, with the cooperation of authorities.

The citizens would like to here the views of the politicians in this connection and outside the JS; as the subtle process of indiscipline and corruption is sweeping across the country like an epidemic. There appears to be no agency in existence to bell the cat, as the government itself (as processor) is the culprit in the majority of the cases, and the separation of the judiciary exists only within the files and paper drafts. The nation is passing through a moral crisis, and the drumming is at the political party levels!

A Zabr
Dhaka

Views expressed in this column are the writers' own. The Editor may or may not subscribe to those views. The Editor reserves the right to decide which letters should be published.