

Human Security: A Broader Dimension Liberation and Beyond

by Anwarul Karim Chowdhury

In the irreversible globalization process that has enveloped both national and individual interactions throughout the world, it is absolutely essential that human security in a broader sense should receive priority attention of the international community. Globalization is offering great opportunities for human advance, but is also creating new threats to human security, both in rich and poor countries

In recent years, the concept of human security has been discussed in various forums. A clear idea as to what specifically the idea denotes has not been clearly articulated, not to speak of being agreed upon generally. However, in many forums, the concept of human security has attracted considerable focus. The sensitivity to the term "human security" arises in view of the fact that the term has been used in many different contexts to justify certain course of action either ongoing or planned for future.

It was the Human Development Report of 1994 which for the first time focused on a detailed and systematic approach to human security outlining its new dimensions. The concept of security has for too long been interpreted narrowly as security of territory from external aggression or as protection of national interests in foreign policy or as global security from the threat of a nuclear holocaust. It has been related to the concept of national states than to people.

In this process, the legitimate concerns of common people and their perpetual quest for individual security in their daily lives was forgotten. For these people, security meant protection from the threat of diseases, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression and environmental degradation. The developments of the decade of 1990s throughout the world following the end of cold war have brought to the fore very clearly that many conflicts and their causes are within nations rather than between nations. For most people of the world, a sense of insecurity comes not so much from the traditional security concerns, but from the concerns about their survival, self-preservation and wellbeing in a day to day context.

It has to be recognized that this emerging concept of human security, which has been in existence for ages but remained suppressed during the latter half of this century, has the potential of revolutionizing society in the 21st century. A well-known development thinker at a forum in Tokyo in June had identified three vital elements of human security: human survival, human wellbeing and human freedom. In the irreversible globalization process that has enveloped both national and individual interactions throughout the world, it is absolutely essential that human security in a broader sense should receive priority attention of the international community. Globalization is offering great opportunities for human advance, but is also creating new threats to human security, both in rich and poor countries. Human life and dignity cannot be allowed to be negatively impacted in a world which has made such far-reaching technological advances.

According to the 1994 Human Development Report, human security is a universal concern; the components of human security are inter-dependent; human security is easier to ensure through early prevention; and human security is people-centred. It also cautioned that in defining security, it is important that human security not be equated with human development, pointing out that human development is

a broader concept while human security means the people can exercise their choices safely and freely. Of course, there is a link between the two and progress in one area enhances the chances of progress in the other. At the same time, we should remember that failure in one area also increases the risk of failure of the other. Threats to their immediate security lead people to intolerance. Erosion of basic necessities can generate conflicts. Oppression and injustice would lead to violent protest.

The concept of human security stresses that the people should be able to take care of themselves. Human security is a critical ingredient of the participatory development process. Also, here I would underline the importance of access and equity for the poorest of the poor as being absolutely critical. It has been articulated in many forums to come to a conclusion that human security is not a 'defensive concept' — the way territorial or military security is. It is an 'integrative concept' acknowledging the universal desire of people for self-preservation and self-improvement. It has been said very aptly that the world will not be secure from war and violence if men and women have no security of their individual self. It is the people's security which has come to the forefront over and above the emphasis on territorial and national security. It is being felt that increased safeguards and preventive measures should be in place both at national and global levels to protect the people from the real threat to human security.

Human security has been categorized in the context of economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security. Keeping that as a backdrop, I would like to identify the four areas which should receive a priority attention in ensuring human security:

1) human security threatened by poverty and lack of development; 2) human security threatened by landmines, small arms and light weapons; 3) human security undermined by drug trafficking and trafficking of women and children; and 4) human security seriously jeopardized through human rights violation.

If one single area affects all aspects of human security, that is poverty. Absolute poverty is the most serious and persistent threat to human security in every sense. Unless the poverty situation is redressed through strong determination on the part of everybody in this world, each one of us stands to be negatively touched by the impact of poverty on humanity. The vast segments of humanity in various parts of the world which are sunk in the abyss of poverty has the potential of pulling the rest down. The objective of reducing global poverty by half by 2015 can very effectively contribute to the improvement in the human security situation worldwide. As poverty has the most negative impact on development process as a whole, I would not elaborate on the other elements of development like health, food, education and environment, individually here in the context of human security. I would only underscore the importance of full realization

of the right to development in promoting overall development, particularly in these fields.

Armaments including nuclear armaments are looked into in the context of national or global security. Unless states are involved in conflict and war, these weapons do not affect human lives on a daily basis. The weapons that do affect security of individual person without nations entering into war are anti-personnel landmines, small arms and light weapons. These have been taking heavy toll on the lives of the people in all countries, both developed and developing, jeopardizing seriously the personal safety and security of human beings. The number of people who lose their lives through proliferation and trafficking of these weapons is staggering. These weapons in recent years have emerged as having one of the most dangerous impact on human security.

The third area that I have identified as undermining human security situation and would continue to cause increasingly greater harm to families and individuals is the trafficking of drugs and trafficking in and violence against women and children. The misery and agony of trafficking and addiction on so many human lives throughout the world do not only have an impact on those persons but also on the society as a whole. The trafficking of women and children has been increasing worldwide and has assumed a dimension which seriously undermines the fabric of any society, particularly of those in developing countries. The impact of violence against women is also a major concern and this is true for both developed and developing countries. Among the worst personal threats are those to women. In no society, women are secure and treated equally with men. Personal insecurity shadows them from the moment of their birth. Shocking indicators of gender insecurity and physical violations are many to be found all over the world. It is estimated that more than 1/3 of wives in developing countries are physically battered. In many industrialized countries, this phenomenon has assumed serious proportion at all levels of society.

A longer term — and sometimes not very clearly perceived — threat to human security comes from violation of human rights. In many cases, such violation is done in such a subtle manner that it is only detected till it reaches a point of no return. The manifestation of human rights violation could be different from country to country and society to society. Unless each society has its own monitoring mechanism of human rights violation and apparatus for redress, not much progress would be possible. However, the worldwide awareness generation during the last decade on the need for promotion of human rights at the country level has acted very positively on the human rights situation in general. As the world is becoming more and more complex globalized and the human rights situation needs to be constantly watched and evaluated to ensure human security. Though increase in number of parties to the human rights treaties is a positive de-

velopment during recent years, without an effective national mechanism, nothing broad-based and people-focused could be achieved. It is worthwhile to note in this connection the tremendous potential of the recently established International Criminal Court for the preservation of human security.

In the post-cold war situation and with the increase in the number and complexity of conflicts throughout the world, it is important that post-conflict situation should have human security ensuring safety and security of the individual being. Unless that is done, no peace agreement should be signed.

Experience of recent years tells us that the sanctions regime have seriously jeopardized human security by negatively affecting the lives of women and children as well as vulnerable groups. Instead of affecting the individuals and interests against whom the sanctions are aimed at, it is women and children, the aged and the sick who become the worst victims of these sanctions.

Human security can only be ensured if there is a greater involvement of civil society in support of the activities of the governments. In many cases, it has been seen that civil society, in particular NGOs, have taken very pro-active role in ensuring human security by reaching out to the poorest and the farthest. Increased participation of civil society in the global forums of 1990s as well as at the national levels in support of activities promoting human security have added an essential dimension in the area of partnership for human security.

When human security is under threat anywhere, it can affect people everywhere. Threat to human security can, no longer be confined within national borders and no nation can isolate itself from the rest of the world. Threats within countries could rapidly spill beyond national frontiers posing global challenges to human security. The 1994 Human Development Report very aptly and appropriately emphasized that this invisibility and indivisibility of global human security extends to the consequences of both prosperity and poverty. If prosperity is becoming global, so is poverty.

The real threat to humankind in the coming decade will arise more from actions affecting human security of millions of people than from aggression by a few nations. This demands new policy responses, both nationally and internationally. While global and national security in the traditional sense have attracted our attention over the years, one wonders whether we as individuals feel safe and secure in our day-to-day lives. As we embark on a new century, it is time that we focus increasingly on human security in all its dimensions and manifestations for all people of the world.

The author is the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to UN in New York. This piece is based on the keynote paper presented by the author in Kyoto, Japan at the 4th UN Conference on Disarmament Issues (on 27 July 1999).

Persona of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

by J N Dixit

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I have discussed the mind-set and subconscious orientations which influenced Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as Prime Minister and then President of Bangladesh in specific context in earlier parts of the book. This is an attempt at assessing his leadership role and its impact on the politics of Bangladesh in an historical and overall context. In doing so, I would attempt an analysis of his evolution as a political leader, as a ruler and statesman and then, as a factor in Indo-Bangladesh relations.

Nearly a quarter of a century has passed since his assassination. Therefore, we can perhaps analyse his impact on Bangladesh and India-Bangladesh relations with comparative detachment born of the advantage of some distance in time.

Mujib's origins were from the rural middle class of the eastern parts of pre-partition Bengal. He had his schooling in what is Bangladesh today. He came to Calcutta for his university education and joined the Islamia College. He came under the influence of the Muslim League in his early youth and emerged ultimately in the early forties as a leader of the youth wing of the Muslim League of Bengal. He was a leading and active participant in Muslim League agitation and activities in Calcutta between 1945 and 1947. He was a fervent and articulate supporter of the Partition as well as the creation of Pakistan. He felt that it was the only way in which Muslims of Bengal could ensure for themselves a place under the sun. He was not a religious extremist but was deeply convinced of the sanctity and relevance of the Islamic identity of Bengali Muslims who he felt would not get a fair deal from Hindu dominated India.

These original traits of his politics underwent a profound change between 1947 and 1952. The imposition of Urdu as the sole official and national language, marginalisation of the Bengali language and culture and the insensitivity of the West Pakistan authorities about the aspirations and feelings of the people of East Pakistan convinced him that unless East Pakistan asserts its separate identity and claims its proportionate political role in Pakistani politics, the future of the people of East Pakistan would be dark and dismal.



Mrs Gandhi and Foreign Minister Sardar Swaran Singh receiving Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Delhi, January 1972.

The brutal suppression of the Bengali Language movement led by the students in East Pakistan in 1952 was a turning point in his political life. He became an advocate of decentralisation of power and economic autonomy for the East Pakistanis. By 1956, his new political ideology, focused on East Pakistani ethnolinguistic identity, had taken full shape. He became the foremost articulator of East Pakistanis' aspirations in politics. It must be emphasised that the intensity of his feeling about the identity and aspirations of the East Pakistanis in no way diminished his commitment to the security and territorial integrity of Pakistan. Nor did it erode his deep commitment to Islam as a factor underpinning the identity of the people of East Pakistan. This commitment of his did not weaken despite initial imprisonments and other punitive actions that the Pakistani Government took against him.

By the late 1950s, he had emerged as the most effective articulator of the aspirations of the people of East Pakistan. Brief participations in the elected provincial government of East Pakistan and experience gained as a leader at the national level added another dimension to his perceptions of Pakistani politics; the dimension of the nature of economic relations between West and East Pakistan. His first hand experience of West Pakistan's exploitative interaction with East Pakistan strengthened his conviction about the need of decentralisation of power and wider autonomy for East Pakistan. The consequence was his increasingly repeated advocacy of constitutional reforms in

Pakistan and concretising this advocacy in the form of his six-point programme for decentralisation and autonomy for East Pakistan. He had emerged as the foremost leader of the people of East Pakistan by the early 1960s, overshadowing the older generation of East Pakistani political leaders. The reasons for his dominance of East Pakistani politics do not require any involved and intricate inquiry. First and foremost, he showed a great capacity to understand the changing undercurrents of East Pakistani public opinion. Even more importantly, he became the most effective articulator of these trends and aspirations. His ability with his people increased because other political leaders of East Pakistan did not show the courage or inclination to stand up to the military regimes of Pakistan which came into being from 1958 onwards. He did.

Mujib remained steadfast about his principles and about his political convictions rooted in the profound undercurrents of East Pakistani public opinion. His trials and imprisonments from mid-1950s onwards contributed to his image as a man willing to make sacrifices and face persecution and suffering for the cause of his people. Added to this was his oratorical skill and his appeal to the youth of East Pakistan. More than any other leader of the Awami League, he was the idol of the youth wing of the party. He showed a great capacity to command loyalties of his party cadres for creating and garnering massive emotional support from the general public. The people of East Pakistan and he touched a responsive chord with each other, resulting in a remarkable chemistry of East Pakistani ethnolinguistic identity. The resentment against West Pakistan did not mean that he had cut himself loose from the original political convictions about fear and objection to Hindu domination which impelled him into politics in pre-partition India. While vigorously advocating constitutional reforms and decentralisation of power, he did not demand separation or secession from Pakistan. At no point of time was he critical of his country's government or supportive of India during the period 1946 to 1971. He remained convinced about a separate Muslim identity for East Pakistanis against any revival of domination by West Bengal Hindus backed up by the Indian government.

Over and above all he had the gift of making people whom he met feel that he had some kind of direct personal human connection with them. This was an emotional rather than a political or intellectual phenomenon. It was only after being refused Prime Ministership following victory in the general elections of 1970 that Mujibur Rahman opted for the separation of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh. He formally announced this demand only after being betrayed by General Yahya Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto after prolonged negotiations between December 1970 and March 1971.

It appears in retrospect that he was subject to a sense of romanticised invulnerability. He felt that his immense popularity would ensure his safety and will prevent West Pakistani military authorities from taking any drastic action against him. This could be one of the reasons why he refused the advice of his senior colleagues on March 21, 1971 to go underground and escape from East Pakistan to lead the struggle for freedom. Another reason could be his assessment that if he went underground escaping the Pakistani army, the army would perpetrate greater violence on his people. He had enough opportunity to leave Dhaka and lead the Mujibur Rahman Government which came into being within days of the military crackdown which started on March 25. He did not do this and got arrested instead, being transported to West Pakistan and almost being executed. The fallout of his absence from the liberation war from the early December of 1971 were complexes of inadequacy and non participation in the war which affected his attitude on the processes of governance and Bangladeshi politics in the immediate aftermath of liberation. He was suspicious, even jealous, of his senior party colleagues who constituted the Mujibur Rahman Government and guided the liberation war. Though he acknowledged the unavoidability and usefulness of the Indian support for the liberation struggle, he was not quite happy about the major role played by India in bringing about his struggle of independence to a successful conclusion. He felt that his not being the operational leader of the liberation struggle diminished his position as the supreme leader of the East Pakistani people. He had apprehensions that his two senior most colleagues, Nazrul Islam and Tajuddin Ahmed might replace him as leaders of the government of Bangladesh with Indian support. The factual position however was that there were no grounds for such apprehensions in terms of the attitudes of his senior colleagues towards him or of the Government of India. The proof of this was that throughout the period of the liberation war Mujibur Rahman was declared the President of the Government while Nazrul Islam designated himself only as Acting President of the Government of Bangladesh.

These psychological complexes of Mujibur Rahman profoundly affected his personal attitude as the first head of government and foremost statesman of free Bangladesh. It is in this context that we have to assess his role as President and Prime Minister of Bangladesh during the three short years that he was at the helm of the affairs in his country.

(Continued)

LEST WE FORGET

Zamiruddin Ahmed

ZAMIRUDDIN Ahmed — a social worker, journalist, political activist, diplomat, father, friend and a lawyer — passed away one year ago on August 4, 1998 at the age of 71.

He was born on December 1, 1926 in Halidana, West Bengal, India. He matriculated from Cheragadangi English High School in Ramsagar, West Bengal in 1942. He obtained his Intermediate degree from Rajshahi College in 1944 and his B.A. degree from the University of Calcutta in 1946. At the Calcutta University, he simultaneously pursued graduate studies in law and Bengali literature, earning his Law Degree in 1949.

He was admitted to the Dhaka District Bar in 1950, the High Court in 1960 and the Supreme Court in 1970. In 1950 he was forced to leave his homeland under the threat of detention for his outspoken political views. He migrated to the then East Pakistan and joined the Dhaka District Bar, thus embarking on his legal career in a new land with nothing in his name other than a good education and extreme fortitude. In his later years, he often related the story of how shy he used to be about asking clients for money — sometimes having been cheated out of his legal fees by disappearing clients after having put in many many hours. Fortunately, he was saved from such dire straits by the renowned lawyer, Ataur Rahman Khan, who took him on as his junior, a relationship that continued for many decades. He was co-counsel for the defense in the 1969 Agartala Conspiracy trial of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and others, and went on to be involved in many other important cases. He was legal advisor to numerous corporations and was one of the very few public figures in the then East Pakistan.

He was involved in social service from his early school days when he set up gruel kitchens for famine victims, helped set up schools, school libraries and a charitable dispensary with his favourite head master Bishwa Mohon Roy. He went on to work for the American voluntary relief organization, 'Friend' Service Unit, running their flood relief oper-

ation in East Pakistan in 1949. He was given the responsibility, by Bangabandhu in 1972, to contain the Bihari problem in the aftermath of the liberation war in a humane manner. His social service continued throughout his life.

He utilized his love of the Bengali language and politics by embarking on a career of journalism while still a student under the auspices of Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy and Manik Mia. He worked for, amongst others, the Ittehad, The Nation, Paschim Banga Pa-

trika, the Daily Azad, and the Millat. While in high school, he became involved in student politics. It was during this time that he attended the All India Muslim League Conference and came in contact for the first time with the Muslim leaders of India. This launched his career as a dedicated worker of the Muslim community. He was a close confidante, friend and co-worker of such leaders as Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy, Fazlul Haq, Ataur Rahman Khan, Maulana Bhashani, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Tajuddin Ahmed.

During the early days of Indian independence movement, he joined Suhrawardy's camp to further Gandhiji's cause of bringing sanity in the chaos created by the country's partition. After his arrival in East Pakistan, he joined his leader Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy and continued with his political career in his adopted land. He actively participated in the Bengali language movement of 1952 as a member of the Rashtra Bhasha Andolan Committee. Thereafter, he accompanied Maulana Bhashani to the World Peace Conference of 1954. He was a member of the very first working committee of Awami League convened in 1953.

In 1954 he served as election coordinator for the United Front (Jukto Front) and again, in 1970, he was the Chief Elec-

tion-in-charge for Awami League — coordinating and fine-tuning the campaign programme. During the Jukto Front government, he was the political secretary to the Chief Minister of East Pakistan, Mr. Ataur Rahman, from 1956 to 1958. During the liberation war of 1971, he acted as liaison between the freedom fighters and the Bangladesh government in exile — securing all forms of assistance, monetary to medical, for our freedom fighters. After liberation, he went on to represent his nation as its High Commissioner and Ambassador to Malaysia, Libya and Tunisia from 1973 to 1979. As ambassador he worked to bring about the recognition of Bangladesh as a sovereign nation by the Islamic countries and by Pakistan, and also in securing Bangladesh's seat in OIC. Thanks to his sincere efforts, the Islamic countries learnt the truth about the mass destruction of the nation and its people in 1971, and realized that contrary to propaganda, we are a nation of God fearing Muslims. During his ambassadorship, he earned the respect of his fellow diplomats by his in-depth knowledge of each and every nation and his habit of keeping abreast of the latest news from all corners of the world — a habit he religiously kept up till his last hours in this world. It is worth mentioning here that in spite of his glorious ser-

vice to his party and country, or perhaps because of it, he always graciously declined all offers of the party's nomination on the ground that he would prefer to work in the background to serve his nation and leader. This was very characteristic. No matter how successful he became, he always remained humble and shied away from the limelight. In 1972, when Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman offered him a High Court judgeship, he declined by saying that he was not 'worthy of being a judge'. Bangabandhu remarked 'I am so proud of you, you could refuse a High Court judgeship'. Perhaps what describes him best are the two loving attributes given to him by his closest friends — 'Black Diamond' and 'Kala Chand' indeed he was as rare as the attributes themselves.

He always held the nation, its flag and his leaders paramount. In 1975 Bangabandhu asked him to accept ambassadorship to Libya. In 1976, after Bangabandhu's murder, when he declined to take up his ambassadorial post in Libya, he was reminded by the then President, Justice Sayem, and the powers-that-be, that his appointment had been ordered by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and that his name had been sent three times to the Libyan government and they had accepted him each time and, as such, it was his patriotic duty to go to Libya.

Zamiruddin Ahmed completed his tour of duty in the Arab world successfully. Such was this man that in all his grief and pain at having lost his beloved leader and friends, and despite all the harassment bestowed upon him by the military government of his own country, he kept his head up, never degrading his nation, holding steadfast to his love for the flag and the nation.

As his daughter, what I shall always remember about my father is that he truly considered all men equal and he treated all — young or old, from the lowest ranking clerk to the highest ranking leaders and members of nobility — with the greatest respect.

The writer is the daughter of late Zamiruddin Ahmed. She now resides in the USA.

Nepal's SC Continues Environmental Activism

Deepak Gajurel writes from Kathmandu

CONTINUING its trend of activism in the environmental field, Nepal's Supreme Court has directed the government to set thresholds for vehicular exhaust, noise pollution, sewage release and radiation from industries across the country. The verdict came on a petition filed by a non-governmental organisation demanding a legal framework for controlling pollution, especially from industries. The apex court has directed the Environment Ministry to work out and enforce the thresholds soon. The judgement, which followed intense pressure on the government from the green lobby for action against polluting industries and vehicles, came close on the heels of a

Supreme Court directive to the government to ensure treatment of sewage before it is released into the Bagmati and the Bishnumati, the two major rivers flowing through the bowl-shaped Kathmandu Valley. As the sewage from the city of 1.5 million is directly drained untreated into these rivers, stagnant 'open drains' have replaced what used to be running and fresh river water in Kathmandu. Tribhuvan University zoologist Narendra Khadka has been studying the water quality of these rivers. 'There is no sign of life in the river water. All the rivers, including the Bagmati and the Bishnumati, in the valley are

dead and have been converted into drains,' he says. Nepal's Environment Protection Act of 1997 provides measures for mitigating environmental pollution and empowers the government to set the thresholds for polluting emissions of all kinds. There are three industrial estates within this valley, which is spread across less than 400 square kilometres. Industrial units located in residential neighbourhoods here produce plastic, batteries (dry-shell) and packed foods, among other items. Adding to the poor air quality is a cement factory within the valley which belches pollutants round the clock. The government has now begun to

act. The cabinet has banned Indian-made diesel operated three-wheelers, popularly known as Vikram Tempos, from plying in the streets of Kathmandu from August 17. According to experts, the 12 seater three-wheelers are the main cause of vehicular pollution in the capital. Recognising that the smoke belching three-wheelers contribute tremendously to pollution, the Transportation Department has outlawed registration of these vehicles throughout the country with immediate effect. Some 2,000 tempos currently ply in the streets of Kathmandu. An estimated 10,000 of them are registered across the country.

—India Abroad News Service

By Hanna-Barbera

