

Economic Water-shed

ON the economic front we are having to contend with three inauspicious pieces of news at the present moment. Let's begin with the latest one. World Bank Country Director Frederick Temple has strongly hinted at an almost 50 per cent reduction in the Bank's lending plan, 1999-2000 for Bangladesh from last year's level excluding flood-related assistance. Furthermore, only one-third of the total lending could be real investment under the proposed plan. His disclosures came at a briefing session with our planning ministry on Tuesday, held against the backdrop of the Bank's Board discussion on the Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) for Bangladesh. The resident chief has made it clear that it had to do with the Bank's latest policy based on performance (rating). The saving grace, however, is the scope for further 'discussion' before the size of the assistance plan is finalised.

The second predicament we face comes in the shape of an irony: when the South-east Asian economies were in turmoil they devalued their currencies sharply with the result that the prices of their exportables enjoyed an edge over our export prices. Ironically, when they are on a recovery course now, their cost of production has gone down, exports are picking up and they are veering away from relocating their 'sun-set' industries or making any new investment elsewhere. Even foreign investors may feel drawn to these countries now. Thirdly, as Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria has rightly pointed out, "it is not possible to avert the impact of the global slump." The growth rate of international trade having dropped by 2-3 per cent last year, our export has fallen and it affected the industrial production "I think the growth of investment has also fallen", added Kibria.

The WB's progress report, '99, however, says, "Macro-economic management remained reasonable in the face of severe flood-related exogenous shock." Temple has also termed the performance in the social sector as a 'high-case' one, to use the WB's parlance.

The main thrust of the WB's criticism is on the political and law and order situations reducing absorption capacity and the 'slow-down' of the reform process in the financial and human development sectors. While the public sector is in a dire loss-making strait private sector growth is badly hampered by shortage of power and bank financing. To respond to this situation the Finance Minister in a meeting with the banking sector has announced the lowering of interest rate and a liberal industrial lending policy for the private sector. This is a welcome change of credit policy but will be of little avail unless it is followed by a radical improvement in the power supply position and unimpeded functioning of the other aspects of infrastructure.

Terrorising the Town

TERRORISTS put to sword the citizens of Barisal following the killing of a 'top terror' of the town named Masum, who was also a leader of Jubo League, the youth wing of the ruling party. Within 48 hours of the murder, armed hooligans vandalised a large area of the town on last Monday night and then came back on Tuesday night also opening small arms fire, setting houses ablaze and looting private houses. A number of innocent people were injured. The district wing of the BCL organised a protest meeting at local Aswini Kumar town hall and, according to newspaper reports, a gang of motorbike riders drove into Amanatganj area blasting crackers and shooting guns. They stormed the residence of a local BNP leader for the second night in succession, looted the house and torched it. The vandals also damaged other properties and looted whatever they could lay their hands on, all these taking place in the presence of a police force posted there to stop the carnage.

The entire town is in the grip of panic and shock. We have observed the hype created in the name of combating operation, mainly in the southern districts, but have the authorities really been able to bring the real culprits to book? The answer cannot be yes. The law and order situation across the country has plummeted in recent times. Normally such a situation might have been created by those who are opposed to the government but in actual fact lawlessness is being the handiwork of people who are identified with the ruling party. Why should the law enforcing agencies give indulgence to these characters is anybody's guess but this has to stop and they must act responsibly to maintain law and order going by government's commitments in this behalf. We demand the culprits be brought to book without fail and peace restored to the troubled area at once boosting the confidence of the peace-loving citizens.

Woman Repression

WHILE observing the Women Repression Resistance Day on Tuesday, some women's groups demanded that a parliamentary standing committee be formed on repression of women and protection of their rights. A full-fledged law on woman and child repression being in the offing it could be a good idea to have a committee like that. They recalled Yasmeen of Dinajpur, who was first violated by some policemen, murdered on August 24, 1995. The incidence of brutality against women has been on a steep rise this year leading us to believe that the administration is still unsure about taking some drastic measures towards ensuring a gender-sensitive society.

We appreciate the activists' protests and demands, but also like to remind them that merely one day's protestations are not enough. We have miles to go on this front. Organisations that are fighting for the rights of women have to take a united stance on the question. They can rest assured that the civil society will stand by them.

We urge the government to enforce the existing laws unerringly. We also urge the government to expedite the judicial procedures against those who violated Sima Choudhury, Tania and Moushumi so that others of their ilk are deterred and our sisters feel cared for.

Tensions in Far East: Impact on Nuclear Proliferation

by Harun ur Rashid

The expectation that the cessation of super-power rivalry and nuclear confrontation will set in a whole range of progressive changes to undo the social, economic and political distortions in the world has evaporated. It will appear that we head into a century and a new millennium with threats to international peace and security. We are far from winning our cherished goal — global peace

A drama with a great significance is unfolding in the Far East. The recent unexpected behaviour of Taiwan and North Korea has generated mounting tensions in relations among the US, China, South Korea and Japan. Although after the end of cold war Russia is perceived no more a threat to the countries in the Far East and the US, forces of destabilisation seem to have been unleashed.

In order to gauge the fragile nature of the security in the Far East it is necessary to assess the scenarios spreading there and examine the implications on the US, South Korea and Japan and their responses thereto.

Not surprisingly, political wrangles are endemic in the region. At present a tangled web of situation is developing which may lead to the collapse of the non-nuclear proliferation regime.

Why do I hold this view? The following analysis of the rhythms of change in the area may provide the answer.

China-Taiwan Tussle

President Lee of Taiwan made a statement on July 9 that its relations with China would be on a 'state-to-state' basis which ignited the current tensions between China and Taiwan.

China perceived the statement as a step toward a formal declaration of independence and was fully prepared to attack, if necessary, on the nationalist island if it would move away from Chinese sovereignty. "One China policy" remains the core of China's relations with other countries including Bangladesh. China regards Taiwan as a renegade province of China.

On the other hand, most of the Taiwanese have no desire to unify with the China. They argue that Taiwan was controlled by mainland China till 1895 and Communist China has not exercised sovereignty over Taiwan for one single day, since its establishment in 1949. They also argue that the fact that Taiwan has substantial ethnic populations does not mean that they have no

right to exist as nationals of an independent state.

However, Taiwanese are willing to reunite with the mainland provided China becomes a democratic country with multi-party system. Taiwanese claim that they have established a free, open, democratic and highly successful and wealthy nation. The bottom-line appears to be that so long China has a communist system, Taiwan is reluctant to unify with the mainland.

Taiwan is aware that under its bilateral treaty with the US, it is entitled to protection by the US against any attack by China, if China attacks Taiwan, the US is likely to be involved. Here lies the danger.

North Korea's Threat to Launch a Missile

North Korea's intention to launch a long-range missile has destabilised the security profile in the region. Tension has been mounting because the long-range missile could hit the US mainland.

North Korea claims that it has developed missiles because the US has deployed nuclear weapons and troops in South Korea. North Korea fired a medium range missile on August 31 last year, which flew over parts of Japan and landed in the Pacific.

This action of North Korea had unnerved Japan although North Korea claimed that the missile was purely for defensive use and it would not fire a missile unless any country (the US or South Korea) would commit a harmful act against North Korea.

South Korea is equally concerned with North Korea's intentions. Recently South Korea sent its Minister to China to dissuade North Korea not to fire the long-range missile. China's relations with North

Korea are not as friendly as before after China introduced free-market economy in the country and recognised South Korea in August, 1992. However China remains North Korea's ally and fought together in the Korean war in the 50s.

Furthermore, North Korea is believed to have the capacity to produce nuclear weapons and the 1994 agreement between the US and North Korea aimed at resolving the nuclear proliferation threat from North Korea. The US, Japan and South Korea were willing to consider North Korea's security interests and the US promised to provide nuclear reactors to North Korea in exchange for abandoning the programme on nuclear weapons. If the agreement is not complied with by the US, North Korea might resume its nuclear programme. It is believed that North Korea is not happy with the US for its compliance of the agreement.

This agreement of 1994 implies that both South and North Korea are now committed to not developing nuclear weapons. Some strategic analysts maintain that this understanding should be codified in an international treaty creating a nuclear free zone in the Far East which will include Japan and Taiwan. The value of the treaty could be enhanced by including a pledge by Russia, China and the US not to use nuclear weapons first against each other in the region.

Some analysts believe that North Korea's intention to launch the long-range missile is only a bargaining ploy to receive more monetary aid as the country has been going through very hard economic times. Harvests have failed, disease and malnutrition prevail among the children and the country needs desperately food

aid from other countries. At the time of writing, there are indications that North Korea may soften its stand and negotiate the missile issue.

Implications

Widespread revulsion against nuclear weapons in Japan in response to the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has led the Japanese government to pursue its policy that it will not manufacture or possess nuclear weapons and will adhere to Non Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NNPT) and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

However, in the event of North Korea developing nuclear weapons and its long-range missile system, Japan may not remain a silent spectator. There is a view that although Japan is under the US nuclear umbrella, Japan may not be satisfied with the situation. It is argued that it is not inconceivable Japan may pursue its nuclear programme for security reasons if North Korea is determined to manufacture nuclear weapons.

In the event of Japan acquiring nuclear weapons, its impact will be reverberated through South-east Asia and it will be difficult to keep South-east Asia nuclear free zone. It would signal and accelerate the collapse of NNPT.

The debate within the US administration about how to address the problem of nuclear proliferation remains unresolved 30 years after the NNPT. The US continues to wrestle with what nuclear policy and nuclear force structure make sense in light of the collapse of communism and end of cold war.

It is acknowledged that deterrence is the principal purpose for which the US retains nuclear weapons. In recent

days there has been much talk in the US about the danger of a deliberate nuclear strike by a 'rogue' nation. It appears that the debate centres on the desirability of deploying a missile defence system to seek to shoot down missiles after they have already been fired at the US, rather than on the means to deter the development of such capabilities or their use. The US and Japan have agreed to undertake joint research to develop a shield against nuclear attack, a mini version of 'star wars' of Reagan era, much to the displeasure of Russia as it purports to breach 1972 ABM Treaty.

The critics view the commitment in the NNPT to move toward nuclear disarmament by the five nuclear powers as mere rhetoric, although the US wishes to limit the strategic warheads between 2000 to 2,500 from their present level of 6000 in a new treaty with Russia, known as START III. It appears that the US refuses to begin negotiations to eliminate nuclear weapons, proclaiming that nuclear deterrence will be an element of US policy for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, CTBT, it is argued, does not preclude what are known as sub-critical tests and the US, it is alleged, is not pushing disarmament or non-proliferation. It has broken the spirit of the NNPT by sub-critical testing and cyber-testing. It is feared that unless something is done to bring a real time-frame for disarmament into negotiations, the NNPT may cease to exist.

Where will This Lead to?

The re-unification of South and North Korea appears to be far off. There is a view that China may consider the united Korea as being a part of anti-

China alliance unless the united Korea would agree to end the alliance with the US and expel the US troops from South Korea. This again depends on whether there are any nuclear weapons or weapons-grade fissionable material in North Korea.

Furthermore the development of North Korean nuclear capability may send danger signals to Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and besides, the US. The Asian countries in the region might be tempted to acquire nuclear capability. This is a strategic reality.

After India and Pakistan detonated nuclear devices last year, there is no stigma attached to a country which might add to the list of nuclear powers in Asia and Africa. This might end the worldwide non-proliferation regime and the world would face a nuclear threat. We are back to square one from where we started.

Conclusion

Overall it appears to be a cynical picture. Shifting of alliances of convenience predominate over parties of principle. It might be more accurate to think of the period in terms of destabilisation unless the regional countries and the US come to an understanding on the critical issues facing them. The realignment of forces would reshape the pattern of security in the Far East and it will have diverse ramifications in all parts of the world.

There does not appear awareness of a dawn to come soon. The expectation that the cessation of super-power rivalry and nuclear confrontation will set in a whole range of progressive changes to undo the social, economic and political distortions in the world has evaporated. It will appear that we head into a century and a new millennium with threats to international peace and security. We are far from winning our cherished goal — global peace *sine qua non* for progress and development.

The writer, a Barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the United Nations, Geneva

Pandemonium in Bangladesh Secretariat

by A B M S Zahur

Despite the gravity of the situation it may, be wise to take unduly harsh measure. Whatever action the present government like to take they have to decide only after consultations with the leaders of the movement. If the government is unable to accept the demands it must explain the difficulties.

WE are aware that we lack the sense of discipline. In our private life we do not practice discipline. As we do not bother about discipline we never care to know how much loss we incur due to our indiscipline behaviour. Without undertaking any serious study it is not difficult to conclude that loss due to our lack of discipline is considerable and this deficiency in our character can be identified as one of the impediments to our development efforts. The recent happening in the secretariat is a clear manifestation as to how low has gone our administrative discipline. The incident is not only unfortunate, it is dangerous as well. If we do not have any respect for hierarchy, are we not heading toward mobocracy in our quest for establishing democratic order?

In any country, developed or developing, the government employees press for their demands if a government fails to pay due attention to their demands. On the other hand the employer should carefully consider the limits and limitations of the government before placing their demands. There must be mutual trust between the government and the government employees. In case of any misunderstanding there may be open dialogue between the government and the government employees to thrash

out differences.

The main demands of the secretariat employees are office timing, allowing dearness allowance and higher level of minimum pay. All these demands have financial implications. After such a devastating flood only a few months back and strong pressure from the donor agencies to reduce the revenue expenditure, the employees appear to have chosen a wrong time to attain their objective. While there may be serious discussion on recently introduced office timing it may be premature to start any dialogue on introduction of dearness allowance or raising the level of minimum pay when the implementation of the last Pay Commission has just been completed a month back.

Whatever the issues are, no government servant has a right to break or destroy discipline to attain their objectives. Since the Pakistani days one of the critical factors for inefficiency of Bangladesh Secretariat is indiscipline. Whatever the sense of discipline existed in those days was almost lost in Bangladesh due to various reasons.

A brief analysis given below may help understanding the problem.

Immediately after attaining independence the government was extremely busy with the task relating to reconstruction and rehabilitation of the completely shattered economy. This resulted in laxity in administration. The various service associations and groups took advantage of the situation to improve their positions and power. Discipline seemed returned to some extent for a brief period after the assassination of Bangabandhu due to the fear of possible toughness of a military regime. It may be pointed out that at the end of his regime Bangabandhu with all his grace and kindness was disgusted with the indiscipline administration. As Ziaur Rahman had to concentrate on the urgent need for restoring discipline in armed forces and to continue with reconstruction and rehabilitation and modernisation of the economy he could not find enough time for raising the level of civil administration. However, a pay and services commission was set up under

the chairmanship of a retired civil servant to study this aspect of administration also.

The commission could not pay due attention on this important aspect of administration due to paucity of time. Though for a brief period, only during the regime of Justice Sattar, we find some tangible attempt to bring discipline into the country (dismissal of several thousand bank employees was made).

The rapid deterioration of discipline in Bangladesh administration started during the Ershad regime. It was due to Ershad as to why more than 400 corrupt senior officers were spared from dismissal/compulsory retirement from service in 1983. In later years these officers were instrumental in Ershad's attaining power and prosperity. Some of these officers played pivotal role in nullifying the attempt of the caretaker government to prove the charges of corruption against him. Whatever discipline was left in the labour sector was destroyed by Ershad through his attitude to compromise at any cost to gain

cheap popularity. One of the main reasons for making Bangladesh manufactured products less competitive is labour indiscipline resulting in poor productivity.

As BNP came to power in 1991 they started the regime shakily and with low level of confidence. They could hardly think about improving the level of efficiency of the administration and maintained the level of the Ershad regime. Though they faced indiscipline behaviour in the Secretariat they ignored it and got the result of overlooking such important aspect of administration in 1993.

Apparently peaceful or normal atmosphere had returned to Secretariat. It is unfortunate that the BNP is encouraging the government employees not to cooperate with the present government. This is dangerous because such encouragement leads to indiscipline. They should not forget that if they come to power they may not be very happy with indiscipline employees. It may not be preposterous to assume that the recent pandemonium has some link with the

recent encouragement of BNP not to cooperate with the present government.

Despite the gravity of the situation it may, be wise to take unduly harsh measure. Whatever action the present government like to take they have to decide only after consultations with the leaders of the movement. If the government is unable to accept the demands it must explain the difficulties in accepting them. It must not take decisions arbitrarily as has been done in some pay enough to meet the basic needs in case of low grade employees their additional income from their part time jobs or any other assignments used to satisfy their gap in income needed to meet the demands. With the new office timing this income has stopped. The paltry amount they receive per month is just not enough. For other demands further discussion may be held only after a year or so. In the meantime the government may start the exercise for reducing the size of the Secretariat at least by 30 per cent. Immediate relocation of surplus personnel will not only reduce revenue expenditure, it will reduce the possibility for frequent agitations and ensure better utilisation of the personnel and decrease the level of corruption.

The writer is a retired Joint Secretary.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Eviction

Sir, Millions of our people live below the poverty line. How many of them can afford concrete houses? Most of our poverty stricken people reside in tattered huts, bamboo-made tinsheds, shacks, shanties and shanties all over the country without any electricity, water supply, sanitary arrangements and road communication facilities.

True, Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi and Jessore cities abound with hundreds of slums and shanties. Poor and destitute flock to towns only because they have no means of livelihood in their villages. In Dhaka and other towns these unfortunate people earn their bread by peddling rickshaws, pulling carts, working as day labourers, maid-servants, hawkers and vendors. They do not have any sincere and dedicated political leader to look into their manifold problems, miseries, hardships and difficulties and to help alleviate their untold sufferings.

On the contrary the political leaders use and misuse these poor people for holding public meetings, rallies, processions, hartals and strikes as and when necessary to meet their selfish ends.

The government seems to have made some prior arrangement for accommodation and food for the surrendering terrorist and outlaws. But it has not made any proper arrangement of settlement for the eviction of hundreds of sex workers of Narayanganj. And now thousands of slum-dwellers are be-

ing evicted without any arrangement of their shelter, food and means of livelihood.

Is this not an un-civilised and inhuman act? Is it not violation of human rights? Where is the accountability and transparency of our people's elected government?

O. H. Kabir
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Trivialising Bangabandhu

Sir, I agree in principle with Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Haliz's article on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman published in the DS on Aug 15; and respectfully urge all AL leaders to read it several times to get the message and ponder over it. Nothing new has been said there, but AL has to take a clear policy decision on the issue, for the sake of the nation. Ranting about the killers all the time is not the way to go about it.

Awami League treats BB first as an Awami Leaguer, then as a national leader. This priority may be changed, to enable non-AL citizens to take part wholeheartedly in all function in regard to the father of the nation (and not necessarily as the chief of the BAL). AL can have separate party functions on BB as the AL chief. He is above politics, as pointed out in another commentary by Shah Husain Imam 'Keep Him Above Politics, Please' on the same page on the same day.

AL and BNP should come to an agreement on proper recog-

nition of BB and late president Ziaur Rahman — now one name is taboo to the other party. Why these basic differences of opinion cannot be sorted out through high-level statesmanship? The two major political parties have divided this homogeneous nation into two distinct groups, affecting the national unity, in normal times, and at times of crisis. That is the job and responsibility of the national leaders (otherwise they are not eligible to the leaders at all on any other count).

We are suffering from poor and narrow-minded leadership, and cannot do anything about it! The people are losing respect in this type of leadership — loud but inactive, lacking the guts to face some of the basic issues dogging the nation for three decades.

Should we allow such stalemate at the top to continue for generations? The current leadership of this decade is not making us feel proud as a nation, (not as party followers).

Party loyalty is perfectly all right, but national priorities come first and take precedence. We talk about sacrifice, but where is the sacrifice and the moral courage to solve this issue (one apolitical BB)?

AZ
Dhaka

Calcutta joy rides

Sir, The Chittagong Mayor's official proposal to start a bus service between Calcutta and Chittagong is not essential, and appears to be a political stunt; as the Chittagong passengers can come to Dhaka and avail of the bus service. It is not difficult to introduce quota system for reservation of seats for different zones of the country. Why this premature proposal when the country is in the grip of the transit/transhipment debate? Also it is too early to start another service before review-

ing the current service after a few months of operation. The Chittagong city has more urgent problems, and the Mayor Sahab is thinking of Calcutta — his mind is not where his body is!

A. Husain
Dhaka

Moon craters on the way to ZIA

Sir, Airlines passengers have to reach the airport in time for embarkation formalities to catch the flight. Conscientious nations keep their airport roads well-maintained and regulated so that passengers can reach the airport timely. Whereas, a passenger, even from five-star hotels, can't avoid two level crossings on his way to ZIA of our capital city. Besides, logjams at these crossings, delayed/regular trains often become nerve breaking experience for the passengers. On top of these, the level-crossing at Staff Road has become a menace for all road users whose destinations are ZIA and any other cities of northern districts.

This two-way airport road, at Staff Road Level Crossing, has a speed breaker for those heading for ZIA from the City (Logic behind having a speed breaker at this point, when other at Mohakhali or Moghbazar not exit is not understood), but none for those returning from ZIA to the City. Since last June, a number of pot-holes have been developing one after another, before and after the said speed-breaker, turning it into a risky spot for motorists to negotiate. Slowed down scrambling vehicles induce traffic imbroglio here now and then. When train passing also coincides, then only God knows, how and when, a trapped passenger would get to ZIA, before his flight got airborne.

None, in the helm, is seemingly concerned about this precarious condition of the Staff Road end level crossing. Even last month our PM, with entourage, had travelled to UK and Morocco through ZIA. Probably, they had no time to cast a glance on that. But, I am sure, they must have noticed the visiting countries' road to airport. Though from Shahabag to ZIA is VIP Road, PM and her entourage slipped through the maintained and well-regulated Cantonment Road, by-passing the discussed spot. Other high ups, those went to ZIA to see off, too followed the same route.

We find our PM stares at happenings at her own level, focusing astern for steering forward the statecraft, but never above or below that. Otherwise the PM would have noticed (at least) the writing on the overhead-distance-indicating board, spelling 'Jamuna Bridge-109km.' Only few yards short of that is the said crossing where mooncraters exist. What international visitors think as they find the road linking other cities via airport and air route kept unrepaired for months together! Is this called a good governance?

A R Choudhury
Uttara-Dhaka.

Security at ZIA

Sir, I refer to Mr Farhan Qudus' letter of 11th August 1999, published in the DS wherein he strongly advocates that the military should run the security system at ZIA.

I understand his feelings, and am fully inclined to agree that the overall administration at ZIA is in a complete mess. However, what Mr Qudus does not realise is that the airport is indeed run by the military, and I do not mean retired personnel! All the important positions in civil aviation administration from chairman down to deputy

directors, including director and chief security officer, at ZIA are all occupied by serving military airforce officers.

Surely, Mr Qudus' complaint thus speaks for itself.

Md Mujibul Haque
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Beating about the bush!

Sir, The police seizure of 17,000 bottles of narcotic drug from the Kamalapur railway station slum area from underground tunnels (also shown on BTV) shows the extent of *ahimsa* governance. Why the government is beating about the bush to catch the prey who are not there, and the authority know they are not there?

Naturally the question arises how these vacated 'plots' would be plotted in future, judging by the credibility ratings of the governance, and the leaders of the society. The Buriganga is drying, and morality is sinking due to its heavy weight; and conscience is trying to become enlightened to misguide the innocent.

More bushes are now being created politically: the push of the slum refugees into the HC premises, and the residence of a Barrister involved in the court cases. Imagination runs riot when one is at bay! Is the decision-making going berserk, considering the number of bottles involved?

Looks like the non-stop opposition hartal and show-down is round the corner, with Ershad proposing carving of five provinces within Bangladesh, to decentralise Dhaka. The five mini kingdoms can fight it out amongst themselves, adding to the power struggle.

Who emptied the bottles of Phensedyl? They have to cough up the undigested wealth.

Alif Zabr
Dhaka