

Trial is What We Want

IF the publication of Hamoodur Rahman Commission's supplementary report has stirred the hornet's nest in Pakistan it has exercised the Bangladeshi mind to demand a trial of the perpetrators of genocide unleashed on our people in 1971.

We want a trial not out of any sense of vindictiveness but out of an anxiety to see that justice is done to the victims living or dead of the crime against humanity enacted here by the then Pakistani ruling junta with their local cohorts. If we let them off in spite of the disclosures of the Hamoodur Rahman Commission report and the massive incriminating and stark evidence we ourselves have in hand of the genocide, we shall be doing a patent disservice to the norms of civilised human conduct. Furthermore, we would like to see the genocidal episode indelibly recorded on the pages of history through trial proceedings for the sake of posterity.

There is a 21st century perspective to it as well. After the Nuremberg trial one had noticed a certain tapering of the concern over pogrom but lately with the ethno-centric genocide in Bosnia and Rwanda receiving international attention 'crime against humanity' is high on the global agenda again, and rightly so. The recent verdict on Pinochet is also a case in point. Whether it is a crime committed by a collection of individuals or a single individual, an international legal framework, national legal instruments and a framework of public awareness are all there to be pressed into service to try and punish them.

Precisely, who do we want to be tried? The answer is: military personnel for their blatant violation of Geneva Convention and also their barbarous misconduct vis-a-vis whatever remnants of federal authority they were supposed to be exercising in the then East Pakistan. Under the pale of such a trial, of course, would come the pernicious conduct of the local collaborators.

To our Pakistani brethren let us make it abundantly clear that it is certainly not directed against them. On the contrary, it is entirely focused on trying the criminals of 1971. It is not intended at all to denigrate either the Pakistan government or the people of that fraternal country. In fact, we would call upon the people and government of Pakistan to join us in our bid to have a trial of the reprehensible culprits of the genocidal infamy.

While endorsing Prime Minister Hasina's call for apology by Pakistan we do not think it is sufficient because of the implication it holds for the exoneration of the criminals of 1971. A trial is indispensable. Public opinion should be created in Pakistan and Bangladesh so that it can be held at an early date.

Unwieldy Systems Loss

THAT the country's power sector is beset with huge systems loss goes beyond any degree of debate. The contention is, however, on the extent of the loss. Official estimates of the Power Development Board (PDB), Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) and Rural Electrification Board (REB) put the 'actual loss' in the vicinity of 20 to 24 per cent of the total power generation quantum. But sources within these state-run establishments contradict the official claim putting it at 35 per cent. In some areas, it varies between 45 and 65 per cent. Not a happy scenario, is it?

Systems loss is not a rare phenomenon, though. In the developed countries, systems loss ranges from ten to 20 per cent. Technically too, it is not unusual to lose some percentage of power on the transmission and distribution lines. Given the dilapidated condition of the distribution and the transmission lines, higher 'technical' loss in the country is acceptable. What is alarming, however, is the huge 'non-technical' loss or, in plain and simple terms, pilferage. A conservative count puts the amount of pilferage at a staggering 150 megawatt per day, half of total power deficit across the country everyday.

The power authorities have in recent times experimented with different means to cut down on systems loss, needless to say, in vain. The receivers of favours and the providers, meaning corrupt officials within the power administration have blessings of powerful people. Therefore, neither departmental nor legal action is possible against the culprits. Ominously still, money churned out of such an evil practice, according to a report in Wednesday's Prothom Alo, is channelled through to the funds of the ruling and major opposition parties. Overall, it is a powerful chain of corruption.

Initiatives such as the Japan-aided Systems Loss Monitoring Pilot Project can surely help detect the problems and set forth remedial measures. However, unless backed up by political will and administrative sincerity these would be perennially confined to printed letters. Systems loss in the power sector is no longer a technical problem, it has assumed political dimension.

Production Loss in Mills

IT may sound a bit funny but it is true that the Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP) had to call a two-day strike just to remind the government of its failure to meet a commitment it had made to the former a couple of years back. The conglomerate of as many as eighteen trade union organisations of the country, a very powerful body at that, had to go on a shut-down seeking fulfilment of their demands that keep coming back again and again. It is true that some of the demands of SKOP are well nigh impossible to be accepted and implemented by the government. Yet when the government had agreed to implement or accept some demands of the workers why should they need to be reminded of their duty to keep their part of the bargain by self-destructive method? Reports from various industrial belts speak of total and partial loss of production in many mills and factories due to occasional closures. This is not a happy sign for industries already suffering from massive load-shedding. The government should try to reduce the loss in production by talking to the unions before they went for strike. The strike has partially dislocated transportation of goods and movement of passengers on different routes. There is hardly any magical solution to the problem and the government must honour its commitment made to the unions or clarify its position why it has failed to do so. It is never a good practice to agree even on most difficult points only to wriggle out of a crisis and then forget about it. This undermines the prestige of the government and curtails industrial production which is so vital for the growth of our economy. These issues should never be taken lightly. We urge the government to sit with the SKOP and solve the problems as early as possible.

AFTER months of speculations, President Clinton, while addressing the students at Georgetown University on September 2, has finally announced that he is leaving the decision as to whether the controversial National Missile Defense (NMD) should be deployed or not to the next administration. His decision not to go ahead with the proposed deployment of about 100 missile interceptors in Alaska, along with an acquisition radar, by 2005, which were to deter possible missile attacks from 'rogue states' like North Korea, Iran, and Iraq has been welcomed by international community most enthusiastically and they are visibly relieved. President Clinton is going out of the White House in January next year and this is perhaps one of the most important decisions made by him before he retires that would have a lasting impact on humanity as a whole. Why did he make such a decision and what kind of legacy is he going to leave behind as the president of the United States?

This brings us to the debate about the possible development and deployment of NMD inside and outside the United States that has been going on since 1995. At the heart of it lies former President Ronald Reagan's 1983 Star War, proposed to be built to deter the missile attacks from erstwhile Soviet Union but it was put to rest once the 'evil empire' collapsed in 1990. But the issue emerged anew as intelligence reports kept pouring in suggesting the 'rogue states' capability to strike US territories with nuclear missile attacks by the year 2005, which the existing deterrence is unable to take care of.

Proponents of NMD namely behind the scene defense industries, conservative think tanks and antimissile-system advocates have been justifying the deployment of the system arguing that there are now growing threats to US territories by these 'rogue states', who are acquiring increasingly sophisticated missile technology capable of delivering not only nuclear warheads but biological and chemical weapons as well and that US national security can not be compromised even if it meant a new era of strategic thinking and when right technology was available. It would be strategically, morally and politically incorrect not to deploy NMD.

The opponents, however, hold a different view. They paint a very grim strategic scenario if the NMD is deployed. What they say make

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a lot of sense. They point out that the deployment of NMD would entail violation of 1972 Antiballistic Missile Treaty triggering cascading effects beginning from strategic instability involving Russia, China, South Asia and other nations, undermining the rationale of present nuclear deterrence as well as existing disarmament and arms control agreements. The most ominous and grave scenario is the real possibility of a new nuclear arms race.

The debate over NMD became fiercer when President Clinton signed the National Missile Defense into a law in 1999 (in 1995 he had vetoed a legislation that would have required the deployment of missile shield by 2003 justifying that there was not enough evidence of missile threats from the 'rogue states') in the backdrop of Pyongyang's test firing of Taepo Dong-1, a long-range three-stage missile indicating that it was on its way to acquire capability to strike US soil. Clinton then ordered the construction of \$30 billion antimissile system as soon as the technology was available.

A flurry of diplomatic by-play ensued immediately following Clinton's action. Washington attempted to persuade both Russia and Beijing that the proposed NMD was not meant to undermine their deterrence capabilities. Both, however, remained unconvinced as evidenced by their joint denouncement of America's proposed missile defense program during Putin-Jiang Zemin summit held in Beijing on July 18.

On its part Moscow did everything possible from cajoling to show of tempting incentives. To begin with it threatened to withdraw from all nuclear disarmament and arms reductions and control system including the recently ratified START II by Russian Duma, potential withdrawal from Theater Missile Defense (TMD) cooperation with the US and attempts to convince America's European allies about the futility of NMD along with its offer of cooperation with NATO to build 'boost-phase' anti-missile system in place of NMD. America's European allies who have already been skeptical about NMD and feeling left out are

naturally lending a patient hearing to Russian president's counter-offer.

Beyond threats there were dangling of carrots, which include prospects like Washington and Moscow starting new talks that would slash nuclear arms stockpiling beyond the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty's ceiling of 3,000 warheads for Russia and 3,500 for the United States, even proposing to deeper cuts in nuclear arsenals bringing them down to 1,500 if all the current arms control agreements remain in force, agreeing to destroy 68 tons of weapon grade plutonium under the supervision and con-

tinuation something that the American people would intensely disapprove. After all America is the only super power and the most powerful country in the world. Why should America have to listen to any country when it comes to protecting its vital national interests? Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush, whose yet to be sketched out plan calls for a more aggressive anti missile system having numerous sites on land and at sea providing shield not only for American territories but its allies as well, has already blamed Clinton for shifting his responsibility at a critical juncture with regard to protecting US's

rather difficult endeavor on President Clinton's part to come to a decision that might give the impression that he is leaving America vulnerable to 'rogue states' capability to black mail US at the time of a crisis. But it should be discerned that his decision was based on pragmatic, rational and politically right reasons. He never ruled out the potential threats from North Korea or Iran, did not succumb to any external pressure and pointed out that his decision would not have any significant impacts as the system could be developed if his successor decides to go ahead with it within the same time frame i.e. by year 2006 or 2007. It seems that his motivation to call for NMD's delay have been mainly due to his concerns of a world wide nuclear arms race, as reported by National Intelligence Estimate (that represents the collective assessment of nation's intelligence agencies, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Agency, and the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research.) with China expanding its present modest nuclear arsenal of 20 inter continental ballistic missiles to a whopping 200 by 2015 (prompting India and Pakistan to respond with their own buildups) and Russia multiplying its existing war heads, concerns about Washington's friends and allies, particularly those in NATO, and the fact the technology for NMD 'though promising but not yet proven (out of three tests conducted by Pentagon two met with failure including the last one in July costing about \$100 million).

His decision to leave the question of NMD deployment to the next president makes sense not only due to the above-mentioned factors but also due to the fact that the attitudes of both North Korea and Iran are changing, North Korea's offer to abandon its

national security interest. Undoubtedly he would have a large audience for this kind of arguments as we know that playing with peoples' insecurity and fear can be persuasive enough to make people jittery. And when people are wavering and concerned about the possibility of a nuclear attack their immediate reaction is to pay attention to jingoism rather than rationalism. This sentiment can be directed against his opponent's Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore who, like Clinton, is in favor of a limited and land based system. As such in the midst of presidential campaign politicking it can hurt Al Gore depending upon the kind of emotion aroused by the Republican candidate as well as the multi-million dollar campaign by the defense industry establishment in favor of the deployment of NMD.

Obviously then it has been a



PANORAMA
Dilara Choudhury

rol of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) (both countries signed the agreement on September 1, 2000), and relaying of a conciliatory message to Washington about North Korea's willingness to abandon its missile program if other nations would provide it with rockets to launch satellites into space (an assurance given by North Korean leader Kim Jong Il to Vladimir V. Putin during his visit to Pyongyang in July this year as part of his Asian diplomacy aimed at mobilizing opposition against American anti missile plan).

Beijing, on its part, remains most suspicious about NMD as the proposed system could not only counter threats from countries like North Korea but also defend against as many as two dozen incoming missiles, and thereby making Chinese presence deterrence obsolete but also provide shield over Taiwan whose future status is a bitter bone of contention between China and the United States.

It is in this backdrop that President Clinton made his historic decision not to deploy NMD. Now many of his opponents would argue that he has backed down in the face of pressures from countries like Russia and

missile program is indicative of its willingness to reach accommodation with Washington. It has, in the past, used its nuclear program for similar reasons. Most likely it would do it again. Moreover, the historic Summit between the leaders of two Koreas in June and present trends towards their eventual reunification hold the hope for lessening of tension in North East Asia. As for Iran the election victory of moderate Khatami to power is a positive development as well. These changes have been underlined by the subtle changes in their respective diplomatic languages. America is longer the imperialist aggressor to North Korea neither is it officially 'the Great Satan' to Iran. The Iraqi news agency has recently announced that it would now term the American and British planes that patrol that nation's skies as 'migratory birds that have deviated' instead of 'enemy crows'. The shifts came after Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright's disclosure of State Department's purging of the phrase 'rogue states' and replacing them with 'states of concerns'. Perhaps one should not expect too much from all these diplomatic nitty gritty but they do unveil the thawing of the bitter and acrimonious relationship between Washington and the 'states of concern'. All in all the finding of the report, unproved technology as well as the discernible thaw in US's relations with the 'states of concerns' must have prompted President Clinton to postpone the deployment of NMD. His decision to wait and see whether the world can do without the deployment of NMD is indeed commendable. He is, thus, leaving behind a legacy of willingness to search and explore all avenues for accommodation before embarking on a path leading to a new era of strategic instability. After all who wants to be remembered in history as America's Star War president that shook the world. There is now a sense of relief that Clinton chose not to take the path of a Star War president.

OPINION

Return of Vested Property: A Momentous Step

A B M S Zahur

LONG absence of democracy or hitting hard any feeble attempt at establishing democratic order results in unjust and parochial decisions leading to suffering and tribulations of the people. Be it for the majority or the minority community. Enemy Property Ordinance (1969) is one of such decisions. However, in arriving at such decisions the bureaucracy plays a vital role. All repressive actions by the government give bureaucracy opportunities for becoming more powerful because such acts result in expansion of governmental activities. Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 lasted for only a few days. Although almost normal trading activity between these two states started within a period of little over one year after the war, the Hindus who fled away because of their sense of insecurity had to pay dearly for the last thirty-five years. Why? Who are the real beneficiaries from acquisition of their property? Is it the government or the common people or a particular group of people who were benefited unjustly? It neither served the public interest nor the national interest. And, after liberation, except some loud thinking no serious step was taken during these twenty-nine years.

Due to some urgent pressure of work relating to rehabilitation of a war ravaged economy the issue could not receive adequate attention of the Awami regime in the early seventies. During the military-cum-civilian rules of Zia or Ershad this subject went down in priority and no action could be taken because the bureaucracy was in full control and, naturally enough, such regimes are usually insensitive to such problems. During the Khaleda regime the administration avoided such sensitive subject because it was not certain about the public acceptability of a decision relating to return of property worth billions of taka to its legitimate Hindu owners.

Return of vested property to its owners is indeed a courageous act. In fact we have to commend this decision of Sheikh Hasina's government because of the following considerations: (a) Those Hindus who had to leave this country out of sheer lack of sense of security have every right to get back their property if they have not committed any act prejudicial or detrimental to the interest of the state. (b) No doubt the government has enjoyed the benefit accrued from these properties as caretaker and not as their owner. The existence of such an unjust situation so far only proves the government's failure or apathy to look after the interest of the minority community properly. (c) For an even development of

the country we want full participation of all the citizens of the country and religion cannot be a bar to any developmental effort.

(d) How can we forget that without participation of all communities of freedom from the Pakistani rule would not have been possible. Why should such a community suffers or discriminated against in independent Bangladesh.

(e) As a state with secular outlook Bangladesh should not allow such an unjust situation to continue.

(f) The decision will certainly strengthen the base of democracy in Bangladesh.

Sheikh Hasina has already taken some bold and practical steps. This was, however, expected of a daughter of an illustrious father. Already she has earned praise throughout the world for her effective handling of problems of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Let this latest decision earn her more reputation as a politician and a statesman. However, she should be extremely firm, careful and cautious in implementing the decision. Otherwise her benevolent desire may be dogged by the bureaucratic intrigues or strong pressure from vested groups.

The author is a retired Joint Secretary.

Thoughts on Corruption

Mominul Hoque

CORRUPTION has become so pervasive in every facet of life in Bangladesh that the country is highlighted by the world press as one of, if not, the most corrupt nations in today's world. Bangladesh, which has won its liberation from a neocolonial military regime sacrificing about three million men and women, has plunged so quickly to the nadir of corruption that evoked widespread condemnation and concern.

The conniving governmental organizations are the prime sources of corruption in the form of bribery, nepotism, misuse of power, plundering of public property, defaulting on bank loan, false and inflated invoicing, black-marketing of license and permits, etc. The corruption in the form of terrorism, contract killing, extortion, illegal levy of taxes, forced 'harta' and disruption of civic life, religious edict and persecution in the name of Islam, trafficking of women and children, adulteration of food and medicine are perpetrated by

organized groups, both political and apolitical. Corruption in one form or the other is on the rise since 1971, under the successive regime of Sheikh Mujib (the Father of the Nation), General Zia, General Ershad, Khaleda Zia, and Sheikh Hasina. What are the underlying causes for the generation and/or proliferation of corruption in our society?

Five distinct, at times overlapping, causal factors may be cited:

1. Falling standard of law and order; this also includes the perception of the people of the lack of law and order in the society, which unleashes criminal chain-reactions in the society. 2. Lack of accountability of the government, which has blossomed in the absence of a free and fearless public forum, such as radio, television, press and parliament. 3. Increasing inroad of government bureaucracy into all facets of public affairs, which encourages people to bypass the bureaucratic barricade by resort-

ing to unfair means. 4. Abysmal income difference between the rich and the poor. Poverty is an integral 'other side' of the culture of quick-rich-colour!

5. Erosion of social and ethical standard. This perhaps both 'cause and effect' of corruption.

The first three of the five causes, mentioned above, are the direct consequences of the dishonesty and the arrogance of the people and the party in power; the remaining two are the byproduct of the former. Corruption is not an inevitable outgrowth of an evolving society. It germinates in the cesspool of greed for power and fortune. It can be contained, if not eliminated altogether, only by the transparency of the character of the people in power and their steadfastness to the rule of law under the watchdog of a socially conscious parliament and free press. Enacting new laws or more laws is simply a device to deceive the common people, or worse, to cling to the power-base.

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.

Is this democracy?

Sir, A gang of policemen club to the ground a small gathering of men and women who were holding a peaceful political rally is this democracy?

Appointments to government positions at all levels, from the highest to the lowest, are made not on merit but on whether or not the person selected is loyal to the interests of the ruling party is this democracy?

Workers, activists, leaders and even MPs belonging to the opposition political parties are often harassed, jailed or even murdered due to contradictory political opinion--is this democracy?

And now to complete the attack, Judiciary--the nations' main institution is being maligned and intimidated by the Prime Minister herself in order to cripple its function as the last remaining check on the Executive's powers--is this democracy?

The answer to all these questions must be an emphatic NO. In fact, if it resembles anything at all it resembles fascism. In the face of these realities, we learn with astonishment (Daily Star August 17, 2000) that President Clinton himself in a 40-minute speech has singled out Bangladesh to praise the Prime Minister's "initiatives to establish peace, democracy, rule of law and protect human rights". If Clinton really has made such statement, presenting the vilest of black events as pure white, he then must be profoundly misinformed by the US Mission in Bangladesh about what is really going on in this country.

The danger in such unconsidered statements by the world leaders is that it will lead AL to believe that they can continue to hoodwink the world's statesmen and so encourage them to intensify their violation of the basic principles of democratic activity in Bangladesh.

Enndad Khan Johnson
San Diego, CA
USA

Good governance

Sir, The two editorials of The Daily Star of September 9 (Can This Be Called a Law, and Crimes under the Nose) provide the public with an image of the 'good' governance of the ruling regimes, compared to the government's publicity and propaganda campaigns during a period of 24 years. The two versions are poles apart.

Under the various SPAs, 99 per cent of the cases filed (involving 69,010 persons) could not stand in the courts. The other picture is the politicisation of the Police service: the law and order situation today has almost gone out of control.

More such data may be released for public consumption during the pre-election period to enable the voters to choose the right candidates.

Sceptical Voter
Dhaka

DCC and dogs

Sir, The Dhaka City Corporation has forgotten one routine job: removing the rabid dogs in the streets (the census figures should be available in the DCC office). During my lifetime stay in Dhaka, I have seen (along with Mayor Hanif) this operation many times in the past dog catching 'week' by the municipal teams on a periodic basis.

Alas, today DCC is unable to control traffic, regulate the civil lives of the residents, keep the pavements clear and the roads level, not to speak of dogs' life. Surely we are living in this city with a large number of street dogs prowling the streets.

In my locality these dogs raise a hell of a racket at night disturbing sleep. Also, the owners of pet dogs have to abide by regulations; if they are ever told of the dos and don'ts. Why we Bengalis are so casual and informal while carrying out our duties and responsibilities?

AMA
Dhaka

English learning

Sir, English is an international language and is a gateway to knowledge. Efficiency in English language helps enrich our mother tongue. Job facilities depend on the knowledge of English. However, it is a matter of great regret that the standard of English is not at all satisfactory in our country.

There are many educated people in our country who cannot even write a correct sentence in English. But they did study English in schools and colleges. Most of the students do not take interest in this foreign language. They memorise answers instead of acquiring skill or knowledge.

But the students alone cannot be blamed for this. The syllabuses and the books are not suitable for learning the language. English teachers (school teachers in particular) as they are incompetent do not teach English in a proper method. We sincerely hope that necessary steps would be taken to raise the standard of English in our educational institutions.

Md Masum Billah
Dhaka Commerce College

A damned nation!

Sir, It looks like that all of a sudden in a space of the last few years we have become a nation of muggers, rapists, hijackers, kidnappers, killers, murderers etc. How could we have become so violent?

Innocent people are being killed not one but a few every day in broad day light without any fear or remorse. Sometimes so cruelly that it is difficult to believe that a human being is committing such crimes. What has changed us so? Is it the easy availability of arms or lack of punishment? Or both?

Unnatural deaths like suicide has increased also. How many of the women folk are actually murdered and then made to look like a suicide case?

People are being killed for property, politics, money and petty reasons even! Who is responsible for all this and who is going to stop this? It is high time to ponder on this issue otherwise soon we will be reckoned as a barbaric race.

Sarah
Dhaka