

The Yugoslav Drama

With the tussle in Yugoslavia, there will be many things happening between the West and the East, represented by Russia. With the US as the sole superpower and West Europe to back her up, the scale is heavily weighted in favour of the US. The only unresolved question is the competition between the European Union (EU) and the US.

WITH the felicitations extended by the Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, personally to the newly elected Yugoslav leader Vojislav Kostunica, the curtain fell on the drama in Yugoslavia, on 6 October 2000, which really began with the death of President Slobodan Milosevic nearly two decades back. The fall of the dictator Slobodan Milosevic will be remembered as one of the bloodiest episodes in the blood-stained history of Yugoslavia.

Slobodan Milosevic, the just fallen President of Yugoslavia will be remembered for the bloodletting he engineered on his hapless countrymen for more than 10 years. For this, he has been roundly condemned by the international community and is to face trial before the International Court of Justice at the Hague. There are also other bloodthirsty generals who are to appear with him.

The end of Milosevic came rather dramatically and it was a kind of plebiscite that pulled him down. The presidential elections were held on 24 September. And this time the undisputed leader Milosevic faced a rather new face in Yugoslav politician Vojislav Kostunica. Elections were held yesterday (8 October). Already thousands of supporters of Kostunica converged at the city centre of the capital Belgrade, on 25 September, and started celebrating his victory.

Kostunica and his supporters rejected to participate in the second round. He called upon the people to boycott the second round of elections. Earlier on September 30, the Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed to send his foreign minister as mediator. The offer was rejected by both sides. The opposition called upon Milosevic on October 4 to accept the victory of Kostunica by October 6. More than 30,000 people took to the streets. The demonstration snowballed and the demonstrators torched the



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman



Vojislav Kostunica

parliament building and there were scenes of rioting in the streets. The demonstrators occupied the television building and the country came to near-standstill.

All these events were taking place on October 5 and western leaders started a deafening chorus for the stepping down of Milosevic.

It came to an end with the arrival of Russian foreign minister in Belgrade on October 6. He met Kostunica. Following the meeting with Kostunica, the Russian foreign minister told the press that he had congratulated Kostunica on his election victory.

This is how the drama in Yugoslavia ended within ten days. The last hope of Milosevic was Russia, but with the Russians now joining the West in recognising the new regime of Kostunica, it signalled the end of Milosevic regime. There was angry reaction in the Russian Parliament (Duma) whose President characterised the events in Belgrade as a coup



Slobodan Milosevic

d'être engineered by the NATO. It is conceivable that Russian foreign minister has obtained guarantee for the fate of the fallen dictator Milosevic for he is to beat the International Court of Justice.

As of now there does not appear to be too many candidates ready to offer asylum to Milosevic. Vojislav Kostunica has vowed to ensure personal safety of Milosevic. But how far will he be successful against mounting popular anger against the bloodletting antics of Milosevic remains to be seen.

Slobodan Milosevic will be remembered for coining the phrase ethnic cleansing. That is when he let loose a reign of terror for months and years on the hapless Muslims of Bosnia Herzegovina for their simple sin of belonging to a different faith from the Slavs, although they are citizens of the same country.

A few years later Milosevic made a repeat performance on the Muslims of Kosovo and it was

due to NATO bombing that Milosevic's madness could be reined in. Milosevic will also be remembered for the tenacity with which he faced the western pressure, military and economic accompanying crippling sanctions.

With the fall of the regime of Milosevic one of the first things to happen will be the lifting of the sanctions by the West, including America. US President Bill Clinton has strongly supported the popular uprising in Yugoslavia and has declared that he was prepared to lift sanctions with the disappearance of the Milosevic regime.

With the fall of the regime of Slobodan Milosevic the splintering of Yugoslavia, since the death of Tito, has come full circle. It is going to be a painful task to pick up the pieces and rebuild Yugoslavia.

Lying in the heart of Europe, Tito had developed his policy of non-alignment as the centerpiece of his foreign policy. This was a policy of equidistance between the East and West and non-involvement in the Cold War. Tito along with the giants of his time likes Nehru, Nasser, and Soekarno and others built up a huge coalition. With the end of the Cold War, the Non-Aligned Movement has lost much of its raison d'être.

With the tussle in Yugoslavia, there will be many things happening between the West and the East, represented by Russia. With the US as the sole superpower and West Europe to back her up, the scale is heavily weighted in favour of the US. The only unresolved question is the competition between the European Union (EU) and the US. In the economic recovery of Yugoslavia, it is the EU and more specifically Germany, being the closest and most powerful neighbour, who will be called upon to play a dominant role with the fall of Slobodan Milosevic. Yugoslavia find herself truly at the crossroads.

The Right Side of 'Digital Divide'

by Syed Ahsan Habib

THE revolutionary impact of the recent breakthrough in information and communication technology (ICT) affects the way people live, learn and work and the way government interacts with civil society. The new global economy resulting from the emergence and combination of several powerful institutional forces, ICT revolution being one of them, is very significant because it offers the promise of allowing less developed countries the chance of leapfrogging over the traditional development processes in order to improve the quality of life for their citizens.

Access to the Net provides more than economic opportunities. Its major impact in poor countries like ours will indeed be in the area of social development. Information technology (IT) can facilitate distance learning at low cost. Telemedicine can provide access to up-to-date health and medical information to even the most remote facilities throughout the world. Information technology can also help empower civil society, strengthen democratic institutions and make governments more transparent and accountable.

The ability to take advantage of this unique opportunity will depend on a country's capacity to tap the global system of generation and transmission of knowledge, generate indigenous knowledge, diffuse and transfer information, and utilize that knowledge in productive activity. Countries failing to tap this will end up finding themselves on the wrong side of the so-called digital divide. Unfortunately but not surprisingly, those countries and communities that need the Information Technology boost the most are precisely those which are least able to take advantage of it.

As of today, more than 80 per cent of people in the world have never heard a dial tone, let alone sent an email or downloaded information from the World Wide Web. According to the UN Human Development Report, industrialised countries, with only 15 per cent of the world's population, are home to 90 per cent of all Internet users. Less than 1 per cent of people in South Asia are online even though it is home to one-fifth of the world's population.

If Bangladesh wishes to participate in the knowledge-intensive global economy, it must be able to i) reform its telecommunications sector, ii) put in place an enabling legal and regulatory framework and, most importantly, and iii) develop human resources capable of responding to the demands of the information age.

Let me elaborate a bit. Telecommunications sector: Information Technology is empowering only when it is easily and cheaply accessible. So the question is how to ensure information technology access for the poor. There are no simple solutions. The current access facility to domestic and international telecommunications, despite little improvements and the presence of innovative operators such as Grameen Phone, is extremely poor and inadequate to meet the growing demand of the day. Experts suggest that BTB should be privatised and the forces of competition must be permitted to lower the costs of access and to improve services. A quick implementation of and a strong support for the new independent regulator is needed.

With an appropriate regulatory environment, the private sector will be able to provide efficient information and communication technology services at an acceptable cost in the major cities of the country. In the rural areas, where markets will not provide adequate infrastructure investment, government needs to lead. Initially, we can start connecting communities rather than individuals, and this can be done via village telecentres -- also referred to as cyber-kiosks and cyber-café -- or with a single village cell phone, as in the successful Grameen Phone Programme. The donor communities can be approached for providing the resources needed to invest in digital infrastructure.

Convinced that its rural population can leapfrog into the information age, the Indian government has recently launched a massive programme to subsidise Internet access. "As part of its drive to make India an information superpower, the BJP-led government has decided to promote Internet services in India at reduced rates or even for free" (The Asian Age, June 23, 1998).

Legal and regulatory framework: The penetration of Information Technology and the development of e-Commerce is going to revolutionise the way businesses operate today. To facilitate the pace of growth there is an urgency to understand several legal issues that are associated with it. It requires the adaptation of old legal principles to a new environment or the creation of new legal principles to tackle the new

and unforeseen transactions and relationships in business. As I recommended in my another write-up, government should set up a committee of legal and technical experts with a fair representation from government, industry as well as international experts to come up with a list of recommendations on how to provide a legal and tax environment that is conducive to the growth and development of these technologies.

Human resource: Even if telecommunications systems were in place, most of our citizens would still be excluded from the information revolution because of illiteracy and lack of basic computer skills. A narrow definition of the digital divide focuses on access to computers and the Internet. But access alone does not bridge the technology gap. To realise the potential of today's information tools, people need the skills to operate them to better their lives and the health of their communities. The ability to create and share community-relevant information is part of that equation.

Therefore investment in knowledge, coupled with capacity building, will be key to whether or not development efforts succeed. While increasing access to hardware and software is important, a greater priority is to put into place on the development of "human infrastructure" that can use information and communication technologies to reap the digital dividends. There is no alternative to producing large number of scientifically and technologically literate, innovation receptive, highly adaptable, and problem-solving minded people with predisposition to lifelong learning.

Here I would also like to add the comment recently made by Atique-E-Rabbani, Secretary General of Bangladesh Association of Software & Information Services, at the opening ceremony of Grameen Star Education Programme that "Technological literacy is a must. However, we should be very clear about the fact that there is no leapfrogging when it comes to education. Traditional literacy remains a prerequisite for development. First and foremost, we must be committed to the goal of quality basic education for all which also emphasises on social values."

Information Technology is not a magic formula that is going to solve all our problems. It can never replace schools, hospitals, sound economic policies, democratic institutions and the rule of law. It is a wonderful tool, but it is not an end in itself. This, however, does not make the widening digital divide any less worrisome. Some of us who still don't buy the Internet hype, may argue that the Internet cannot change the lives of the poorest people because it does not put food in the mouths. Their question is: do we want bread or do we want computers? Here I would like to quote the same answer that was given by James D. Wolfensohn, the President of the World Bank, at the UN ECOSOC session held in New York on July 5, 2000 that "we want both".

In a speech last year at Telecom 99 in Geneva, Switzerland, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan also warned of the danger of excluding the world's poor from the information revolution. "People lack many things: jobs, shelter, food, health care and drinkable water. Today, being cut off from basic telecommunications services is a hardship almost as acute as these other deprivations, and may indeed reduce the chances of finding remedies to them", he said.

Therefore the message of the day is unless we act urgently on all these issues, the potential of the information and communication technology revolution for advancing socio-economic development will not be realised. There have been some initiatives in the public and private sector, and some resource allocation had also been made by the donors but they lack the much required coordination. A lot more could be done to recognise its importance in ending the vicious cycle of poverty and impoverishment, and creating a virtuous circle of opportunities through health, education and better economic possibilities.

According to Nicholas Negroponte, founding director of MIT's Media Lab, "There have been many theories of leapfrog development, none of which has yet survived the test of time. That's about to change. Now, all we need to do is wake up and chalk-out a comprehensive, well coordinated and well-financed work-plan to push information technology. The process must engage all stakeholders: government, private sector, civil society, non-government organisations, and the development partners. All of us have to work together to transform the digital divide into a digital dividend."

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Different Goals at Different Levels

by Abul M Ahmad

OUR leaders continue to waddle in the muddy waters, grumble loudly, to create dissension and to divert public attention with non-issues. Their perception about leadership is freshly original: that others simply have not the dope to become leaders.

Here, in this evolving culture, to lead means different goals at different levels. In this game, the size of the goal post is adjustable to suit subjective convenience. The referee is indirectly forced to be nepotist, inviting complaints against transparency. Familiarity breeds contempt; and once injected, the virus damages the leadership syndrome (why Mandelas cannot be mass produced?).

Power, wealth and influence are the three attractive seducers in human life, and the three greatest human weaknesses. Neither the rich nor the lowly can resist its corrupting influence (watch the presidential elections in Yugoslavia). The catch is that the critics and observers are also not immune in such societies.

Although wisdom enjoins that power lies in not using it, the potential power of power is not impressive, until used. A water dam is controlled with gates. What happens when the gates are opened during over-flooding, or when the dam is not there?

The problem with the poor

nations is the control of democracy. Democracy is like potential energy; and the kinetic energy is released during application. Three configurations are involved: the regulators, the medium of application, and the targets. In the LDCs, all the three sectors are under-developed; as also the opposition. It is all hell let loose; or beating about the bush.

In this sense, the UN system is over-worked, and is now falling due to maintenance fatigue, reinforced by the donor and aid fatigue. On top is the imposition

from leadership necessary for ordered development of a nation. Mass illiteracy sustains closed and prejudiced minds. It needs profound strategies and planning to mould a huge mass of uninitiated people into the right motivational channels, without triggering the deadly package of weapons assembled from ignorance, sentimentalism, pride, prejudice and ambition.

A have-not society is its own deterrent. The initial taste of money and power is corrosive. Only the top characters survive

easy to rouse and provoke, but difficult to control it, once started, as the environment of discipline patience and tolerance are not there, at least in the political field, due to the current phase of street agitation.

When will this stage of politics be over? People have to control the top leadership, to defuse the bubbles of autocracy.

Wise counsel falls on deaf ears. Noisy administration is ad hoc management, and contingency governance does not serve the ends of long-term development.

Another lapse in the leaders is the insecurity of losing grip of the gaddi. There is a time for work, and a time for waiting or resting. From where the cue comes from, and from where is it expected? If the leaders forget the boundary conditions, the people will remind them. The interactive balance between the leaders and the masses has to be monitored carefully during the formative stage of a nation.

Since the horizon of the small leader is limited, he has to gain height by shedding subjective overloads. The mental strain ultimately produces flippant dissipation, which later becomes the hall mark of frenzied activities, creating a sense of smug self-satisfaction of the sacrifices made for the national cause.

But both candidates are themselves sons of wealth and power. Bush is descended from a 19th century US president. His oilman father, George, was head of the Central Intelligence Agency, Vice-President to Ronald Reagan and then President himself from 1988 to 1992. Gore also hails from a patrician lineage of US senators.

I'm disappointed with what's happened," said Wisconsin Democratic Senator Russ Feingold. "It's all about money, especially corporate money. The (party) conventions are corporate trade shows."

Feingold calls it "our brave new corporate democracy". The co-author of a legislative proposal to reform campaign finance decrees what has happened to the conventions which traditionally select the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates.

"We have devolved from representative democracy to corporate democracy. It's no longer one person, one vote. Its one vote for a million dollars. The fundraising system is legalised bribery and extortion. These conventions serve as symbols of corruption."

"His Senate colleague, Paul Wellstone, from the traditionally radical state of Minnesota, sees the poor always coming last in such a system. It's time for us to find our own political voice," he said. These words were not heard

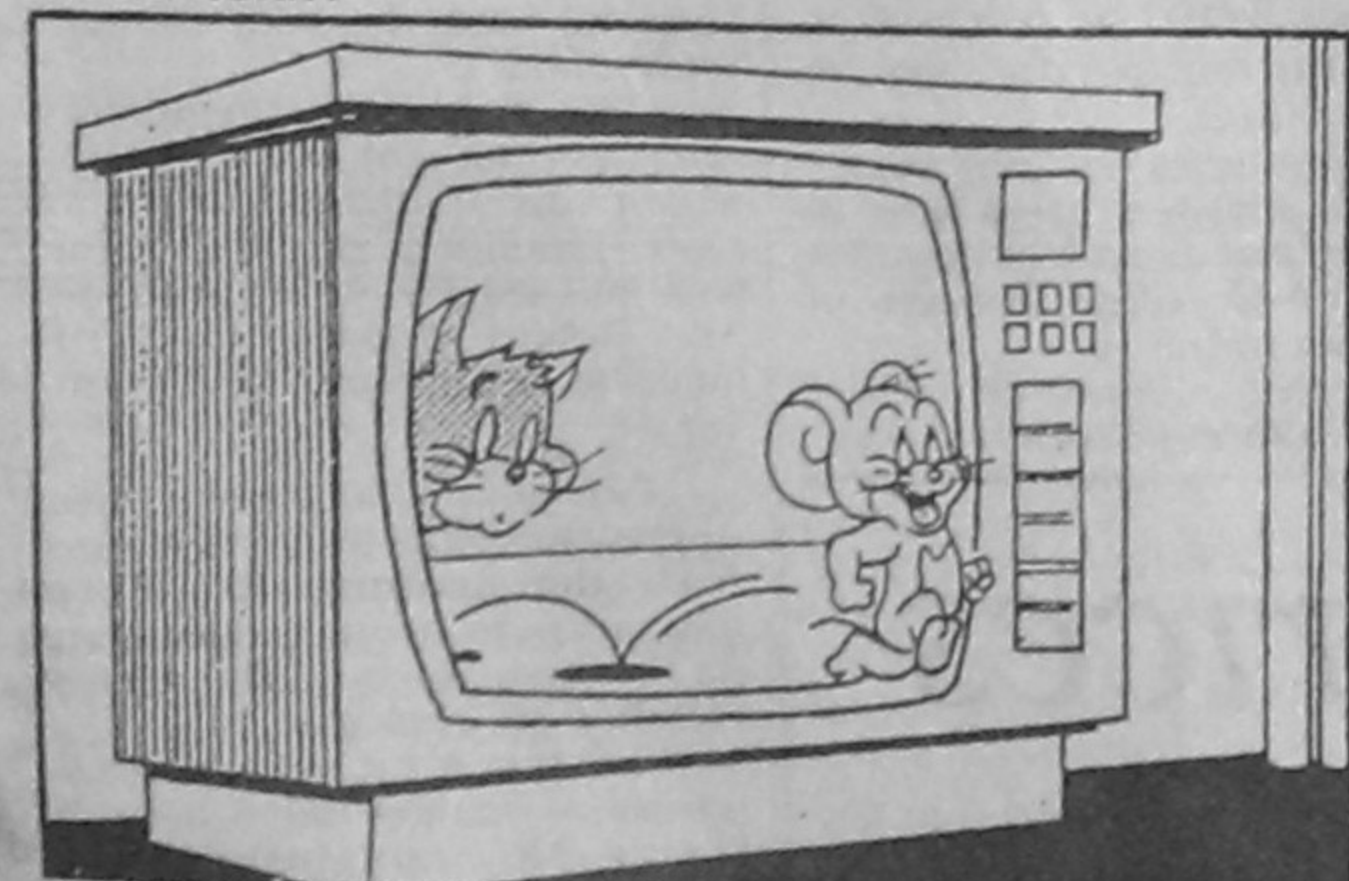
The remedy is simple: cool thinking when the issues are hot. Political consensus is a rare commodity in the third world. An ailment takes its own time to cure, to allow nature to finish her tutorial.

of the Age of Change. The rate of change is high in this Information Age, as the communication gaps close faster than the administration can respond to. All these permutations and combinations call for high leadership qualities in the changing societies in a changing global market.

The remedy is simple: cool thinking when the issues are hot. Political consensus is a rare commodity in the third world. An ailment takes its own time to cure, to allow nature to finish her tutorial.

Traditional leadership is static and evolving. Revolutionary leadership is something different

TOM & JERRY



James Bond
BY IAN FLEMING
DRAWING BY MORAX



ANOTHER
GUARD
RUSHES TO
CHAD'S ROOM



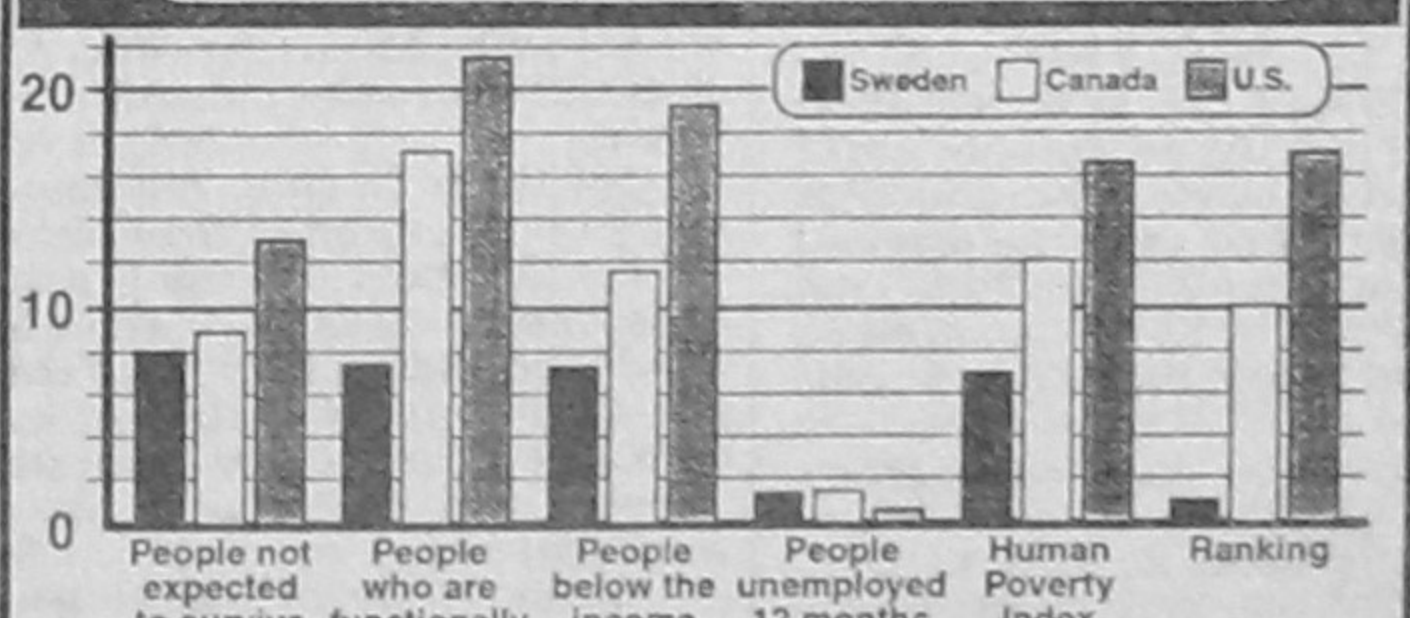
By Hanna-Barbera



US wealth gap



Human Poverty Index for selected industrial countries (%)



- Among 17 industrial countries surveyed by the UNDP, the US has the most poverty, although the highest Gross Domestic Product
- The US is the most unequal among all industrialised societies with 40 percent of the nation's wealth concentrated in only one percent of households
- In 44 of the country's 51 states, upper income families have become richer and the poor have become poorer since the late 1970s
- The middle class is becoming poorer too; the share of the middle 20% of families fell from 17.6% to 15.7% between 1970 and 1999

The inflation-adjusted net worth of the middle fifth of American went down 11 per cent from 1983 to 1995. The bottom 40 per cent of households have seen their net worth decline 80 per cent. Households owing more than their own increased from 9.8 per cent in 1962 to 18.5 per cent in 1995.

"Average wage earners are still trying to recover the real buying power they had in 1973. The average chief executive at a Fortune 500 company now makes 419 times what the average employee makes."

Also lying behind the boastful statistics of US economic success is the reality of prison for many of its poorer citizens.

"Two million Americans are in jail today 500,000 more than in China, which has 25 per cent of the world's population," said Rev Jackson. "Eighty per cent are imprisoned for nonviolent drug charges."

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