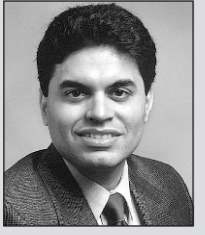


Realism and responsibility



FAREED ZAKARIA
writes from Washington

DDDRichard Curtis, the screenwriter who wrote "Four Weddings and a Funeral" and "Love Actually," has written a new romantic comedy, this time about global poverty. I know, it sounds sleep-inducing, but the HBO movie, "The Girl in the Cafe," is a pleasure to watch. And it does leave you wanting to do something about global poverty, which is not the urge I usually have when I walk out of a theatre.

In the movie, the good guys are the British prime minister, a youthful man who is almost too articulate, and a rumpled chancellor of the exchequer, both of whom want to end poverty in Africa. (Any resemblance to Tony Blair and Gordon Brown is entirely coincidental.) The bad guys are the Americans, who sound cautious and contrarian. But off screen, the good guys and bad guys could complement each other and actually deal with one of the world's most urgent moral challenges. There are three forces coming together that make this potentially the brightest moment in Africa's history: American realism, European generosity, and African responsibility.

Realism is not simply an American attitude, though Washington voices it most loudly. Germany and Japan are also extremely nervous about another round of large-scale aid transfers. They know that unless the recipients are competent and reasonably honest governments, chances are that large sums of

It is estimated that if Africa gained one percent more of the world's share of exports, it would be worth five times the total amount of foreign aid it receives. So America is correct: good government policies are key but in this crucial case, it's our policies that need improving.

money will be wasted. The Western public will come to believe that this problem has no solution. People who speak of the need for a Marshall Plan for Africa should keep in mind that the continent has had, over the past five decades, the equivalent of five Marshall Plans.

The Bush administration's Millennium Challenge Account is the right way to think about financial assistance, because it provides help to governments that have demonstrated the capacity to use it. Giving money to Robert Mugabe is not going to modernise Zimbabwe's economy. The trouble with the administration's approach, however, is that having proposed a good idea, it has not followed through with the cash it promised. The Millennium Challenge Account was meant to have a \$5 billion annual budget. To date, the administration has dispersed a pitiful \$110 million.

European generosity has been more impressive and has forced a shift in policy. Last week the world's eight richest countries closed a deal to write off more than \$40 billion of African debt. Public attitudes in the West are changing. Five decades of peace and prosperity have produced general affluence and also some concern for the fate of the world's poorest. Even in the United States, where the government provides the smallest aid outlays as a percent of GDP, the tide is shifting. Three years ago President Bush increased foreign aid by 50 percent and no one objected. The Christian right has now begun to take the problem of African poverty seriously. The left is increasingly re-energised on this issue as well.

And there are things you can do

with money even when governments are hopelessly incompetent and corrupt. By focusing on health, for example, one can often bypass government failures. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has shown that by being smart, focused and disciplined, you can get a huge

bang for the buck. Nancy Birdsall of the Center for Global Development suggests that about \$5 billion of the new aid money to Africa be spent outside the continent, developing medicines to treat and cure diseases like malaria and AIDS that have crippled Africa's economic growth.



The face of poverty in Africa

The money would be spent efficiently in the industrial world but would have a massive effect on Africa's future.

The most hopeful force for the future is Africa's growing sense of responsibility. Listen to some of the new wise men of the continent, such as South Africa's Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, or his counterpart in Ghana, Kwadwo Baah Wiredu. They insist that unless Africans get their own house in order, aid will not fix anything. They are moving their countries toward better governance and their continent toward greater accountability.

All of this is producing results. The IMF estimates that Africa's economy will grow at about five percent in 2005, and inflation will average under 10 percent. In the past 10 years, 16 African countries have had average growth rates of four percent. Of course, these trends are fragile, and many serious problems, like AIDS, could overwhelm them. But for the first time in modern Africa's history, there is significant good news to report.

In the movie "The Girl in the Cafe," the "bad" American official argues that what Africa really needs is not aid but trade. Again, he's absolutely right. But of course it is American (and European) policy to deny Africa access to our markets. We subsidise a few hundred of the richest agricultural companies in the world, and prevent tens of millions of the world's poorest people from participating in free trade and capitalism.

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Fareed Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International.

LEST WE FORGET

My friend Emran, as I knew him

SULTAN REZA

AFTER Ejazul Huq (Emran) got settled in his new job in Dhaka as Secretary Textiles on return from Washington where he served as Economic Minister in Bangladesh Embassy, I visited him at his office at the Secretariat Building. He had a nice room on the 11th floor with a very good view of the Supreme Court building and the Curzon Hall. I congratulated him once again on his promotion. "After all these years of hard work and honest service to the Government of Bangladesh, don't you think I at least deserve this?" "Of course you do" I assured him. Actually, he was in a bad mood. Very frustrated with the inefficiency and corruption all around him. He told me how the officers of even the Joint Secretary rank, had become inefficient and inept during the past four years that he had been away to America. "Most of them are working to either make a buck, for themselves or pass the buck to others, when the time comes to shoulder some responsibility. They are always looking to cover their backsides by writing office memos. What a waste of time" he muttered annoyedly.

Then he called an Additional Secretary to inform him over the phone that the minister's meeting with the Japanese delegation next morning was cancelled and he can plan to do something else. Five minutes later a peon appeared with a memo from the officer concerned that would confirm in writing what the Secretary had just told him over the phone. This is exactly what Emran was complaining about minutes ago. Secretary Ejazul Huq blew his top. He dialed his deputy's phone number and gave him hell for not trusting the word of his boss and wasting time unnecessarily in memo writing. "If you do not trust my word then I cannot trust your work" I remember him shouting. After that, he looked at me and said "Budhai, Aktoo Baishi Huay Gailo. Ki Bolish?" I said "yes" and advised him to calm down and be more patient as things had changed since he was here last he said that he will keep that in mind. That was Emran. Realising his mistake as soon as he made one and willing to learn from that and make the necessary amendment.

Emran was very neat and meticulous in whatever he did, almost a perfectionist. What a pain! Before setting up the table for Bridge, he would iron the table cloth and use a ruler to draw straight lines for making columns for the score sheet. While serving tea with snacks, he once warned me in America to be careful and not drop anything on the furniture. I reminded him that they were rentals and asked him "Why are you so worried about Bharat Furniture" he said he might buy and take them home. Which he did. Emran and I loved to poke at each other. Which sometimes would come close to erupting into a fight. But one of us would always back out and thus we retained our friendship. Life-long friendship.

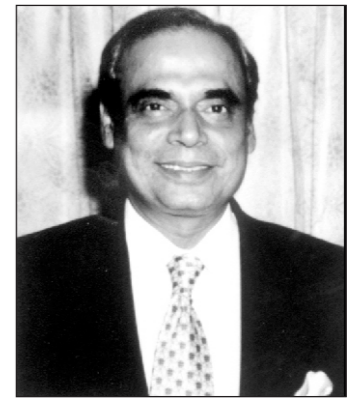
In 1998, I was posted in Bangladesh with a mission to prepare and present a proposal to USAID on behalf of a Washington based Development Organisation for receiving and selling US agricultural product and monetizing that fund to develop Independent Agricultural Cooperatives in Bangladesh. Those two years that I spent in Dhaka enriched my life in another way. It brought me and Emran even closer. I rented a place close to his house, which was always open to me. I had an open invitation to have meals with him and his family whenever I was free or felt like it. Very often, after his wife Nusrat left for work to teach at the Sunbeams School, after my morning walk, I would go over and have breakfast with him. That would be a time, when we would have a heart to heart talk and plan our lives after the retirements. By now, he had become the Secretary of Industry but we never discussed any officer or industrial projects. Except on one occasion when a minister got jealous about his driving a posh car that belonged to KAFCO that he was using as its Chairman.

Emran would also get mad with the constant strikes and hartals that was then being called by the Awami League leaders and implemented by their workers. He would have to go to work by rickshaw and some times made to get off half way and take another rickshaw down the road. I particularly remember how upset he was one morning, when he read in the newspaper that some students had taken off the pants of a government officer for going to work during a hartal. He looked nervous.

I can never forget the day, when I first learnt that Emran was sick and he

was going to USA for treatment! I was still living in Dhaka but had gone on a short visit to Calcutta. I returned on a Friday, so we could play bridge on Saturday. I called Basheer and found out that we were meeting at Emran's place that week. He told me to come over to his place first and then we could go to Emran's together. When I reached Indira Road, Anwar was already there. We started off and then they stopped at a fruit shop. "Let us take some fruits for Emran" Basheer said. After we picked up some grapes and apples and oranges, each one of us started insisting on paying for it. The argument was put to rest by an agreement that all three of us will split the cost. When we reached Emran's, he was still ironing the table cloth. We left the fruits on the dining table. He came out and asked who brought the fruits? I told him that "all three of us paid for it." With his typical dry smile, he said "THO DHEIR AIYE OBASTA? TEEN JOAN MILAY PHOL KINTE LAGAY" (This is your financial condition that the three of you have to pool the money to buy fruits.)

We all laughed and sat down for the game. Suddenly, Emran started coughing and it reminded me of my mother's coughing, when she was suspected for TB. I asked Emran if he had seen a doctor and what did he say? That is when he first told me that he had a problem with his lungs and was advised by his doctor to go to USA for check up and possible surgery as the treatment. I was shocked and could not concentrate on the game.



"When are you going to America?" I asked. "Next week To Boston, where my sister lives. Meenu has already made appointments for me with the doctors for check up at the Boston General Hospital". He informed me. I lived in Vienna, Virginia, just outside of Washington DC which is about 400 miles south and nearly 8 hours drive from where he was planning to stay. I told him that I was returning to USA in a couple of weeks and will contact him as soon as I arrive there. That was our last session of Bridge together.

I came back to USA on March 3, 2000 and called Emran at his sister's place in Newton, MA. He said that the initial medical examination had confirmed that indeed his left lung had a cancerous growth and it has to be removed by surgery. But before that the size of that had to be shrunk and reduced to the size of a table tennis ball from that of a tennis ball. After that Emran also wrote down and circulated a memo to his friends and relatives basically to keep us informed about his health status. The situation was not good but we all had faith in the miracle of modern medical science and it was very reassuring to know that the doctors at the MGH, were the best in the country. I asked Emran, if I should come over but at the same time hesitated for fear of going and imposing on the family that was under so much of stress. Emran told me to go and take him to New York for a day or two. I agreed and we planned to see a play in Broadway. I called back to confirm the date that I would be picking him up. That is when his wife Nusrat advised him to stay put in Boston in case the doctors needed him for anything. She also apprised me of the situation. I postponed the trip. Then Emran called and gave me the date of the operation. May 23 or 24, I think.

Other friends like Kamal and Siddique went to Boston with their wives to see Emran and Nusrat. Samad told me that he met Emran in Boston around that time when he called on prime minister Sheikh Hasina, when she was visiting the University town. She was very sorry to see him so sick. I decided to wait and go a day before the surgery so I could be with his wife and sister, at the waiting room, while the doctors worked on him at the operation table. Emran liked the idea and said it would be nice for Nusrat to have me by her side while he lied unconscious at the operation theatre.

I was there before Emran arrived with his wife, sister and brother-in-law Gulap. Who I met for the first time. Emran looked terrible with his

hair gone due to radiation. Though I was preparing for it, the shock was too much for me. Even his smiling face did not bring a smile in my face. He was jovial and very soon jerked me out of my state of shock. I was ready to trade jokes with him that we usually did. Then the nurse took him to get ready for the operation. After a few minutes, Emran came back with a long gown, smiling sheepishly. "I told him that he looked like one of those old Anglo-Indian ladies that we used to come across in Ripon Street, when we were growing up in Calcutta. Emran joined us in the laughter and told us the joke as about how, after the making of the film Fire, on lesbians, Mira Nair was approached by the gay and senior citizen groups to make film on them. According to the joke, Mira Nair simply gave them the titles and told them to go make their own films "Back-Fire" for the gays and "Cease-Fire" for the senior citizens. Though she considered making "Miss-Fire" about normal man and woman relationship. That was Emran! Full of life, minutes before he was going in there to confront with death.

The operation started at 7am and it was expected to last between 6 and 8 hours. We settled down at the waiting room with eyes on the papers and magazines there but our minds at the Operation Theatre. Nusrat started reading a small book of prayers that I had given her in Dhaka before she boarded the plane for America. After an hour, I decided to go and check out from my hotel which would charge me another \$ 215 after 12 noon my way back, I ate and brought some breakfast for the three of them. Their children, Raihan and Ashna were still in Dhaka. Around noon time, the doctor came out to inform that the operation was proceeding well but it will take another 3 hours. That did not stop Nusrat from crying. She was worrying consistently and did not even touch the Egg Mc Muffin that I had picked up from the McDonald's in the morning. Gulap suggested that we go to the cafeteria and have some lunch. We forced Nusrat to eat something. At 4pm the doctor came out and announced that the operation was over and it was successful. All of us breathed a sigh of relief. We went out to call friends and relatives in Dhaka and other cities of USA, who were waiting to hear about the outcome. Emran was moved to Post Operation cabin at 5pm. The family went in. I chose to stay out. But after a few minutes, Nusrat came out and told me that he was looking for me. I went in and held his hand. He smiled and put up a thumbs up sign. After a few minutes, I told him that I was going back to Washington. He expressed in sign language that after a week, I should come back with a pack of cards and we shall play Rummy. Which we often did in Dhaka while waiting for our Bridge partners. I promised that I will do that. A promise that could not be fulfilled.

Because of the radiation and as a result of medications, his immune system went haywire. He could not resist the onslaught of a pneumonia attack and went on a coma on the 3rd day after the operation. He was put in a respirator and laid in that state for 14 days. I was calling every other day but did not have the heart to see my strong and active friend in that state of helplessness. On June 7th, 2000 drove my wife to New York, which is half way to Boston. She was visiting a friend. On June 16th someone from Boston called our home and left a message that Emran had passed away. Instead of telling me, one of our daughter's gave that news to my wife in New York just as we were leaving that city. She knew how close I was to Emran and how upset I would be to get that news. She did not want me to drive 200 miles in that state of mind. My wife too decided to keep that news from me until I reached Washington. They made a big mistake and I still feel bad about it. If I knew in New York that Emran was dead, I would at least go and attend his namaz-e-janaza and offer my condolences to his family. The body was flown to Dhaka and the funeral took place in Banani. What a sad trip it must have been for Nusrat and the children, who had come from Dhaka after the doctors had given up hopes. It was very gracious of Nusrat to forgive me for not attending the funeral. She praised Shabbir for all the help and assistance he provided towards arranging Emran's last flight back home. Dhaka is my home too and I keep going back there. But without Emran, it is not the same. It will never be.

Sultan Reza is Country Representative, Agricultural Co-operative Development International (USA)

Fixing the arsenic problem

ASHOKE ROY

The lead report by Mr. Naimul Haq on the above topic in The Daily Star was a great hope for many arsenic sufferers in the country. Thanks to Prof. M Fakhru Islam for finding a simple and low-cost technology for arsenic mitigation.

I am a part-timer on arsenic mitigation works for my company GlaxoSmithKline's corporate social responsibility (CSR) project. Naturally, the report has drawn my attention and for a number of reasons it also inclined me to analyse the topic.

Many tube-wells of various depths are contaminated by arsenic in all districts except the Hill Tracts. The catastrophe is no less than any recent calamities in the country. The consequences are more serious. Newspaper reports say that there are 38,000 patients and 3 crore are taking contaminated water.

The device "Chulli Water Purifier" is definitely a ray of hope. It is so simple that anyone can make it and install it in any rural area of the country. It does not need any electricity or special power supply. I also have seen some other devices for house-hold purposes that uses filtration techniques. Surface water treatment for arsenic mitigation is thought to be the number one option prescribed by the experts.

Is it really possible to return back to pre-tube-well era? Think about that time when almost all "paras" (formed by a bunch of families) had a beautiful pond with well-managed stairs and clean surroundings with lots of trees around. They had their best time around it. They used to organise parties around it (now we organise poolside at five-star hotels). It was thought that any good family in a village should have a pond in their residential campus. For many of us, all this is history now.

I have visited many villages of the country to see the arsenic situation. The catastrophe is more than we say or see in the newspapers. A more serious situation is waiting for us due to the slow arsenic poisoning in drinking water, if we do not act

There should be a system where villagers will get ready water for drinking as they were habituated to take water from tube-wells in the past. Development agencies or the government should deploy experts in villages for monitoring of the installed system.

now. I have seen a number of villages in Sherpur, Jamalpur, Sakhira that have no ponds. During dry season they suffer a lot for water. During summer, the water layer goes down and no water is found through the tube-wells.

So surface water treatment in those areas won't be suitable all year round and there should be alternative measurers for the dry seasons.

During pre-tube-well era, village women used to collect water from ponds. Without any treatment or so, they kept water at home for drinking in pitchers. They had no fear of water drinking. With increasing health risk (mainly due to microbiological contamination), Unicef introduced tube-wells to the country. For the last 3-4 decades, villagers were habituated to drink this tube-well water and they knew that it was safe to drink. In the history, both during pre-tube-well era and during tube-well era, village women never treated water at home. They just collected it for drinking.

One agency has distributed a kind of house-hold device to eliminate arsenic from tube-well water in some villages in Sharishabari. I have seen villagers keep it idle on the top of their "macha" (place for keeping paddy). They said that they were more concerned with crops as that was more important to them for living. The donation of the agency went in vain. One NGO has tried to make them understand about the importance of drinking arsenic-free water. That also failed. Villagers should be offered a technology or device that is very close to their traditional tube-well system. It means they should be offered a system where they will receive water to drink. Nothing should come in between.

Many NGOs are working for rain water harvesting technique to fight arsenic contamination. Some are also delivering water to houses through pipelines. Some excellent projects are running in the Comilla area. Practically, due to lack of adequate rain in the country, it becomes difficult to collect sufficient water for the rest of the period. It is also microbiologically not safe to drink. I have heard from many users

that they find a smell in the rain water and that it does not quench their thirst. The idea is very difficult for them to accept. Still with intensive motivation by the NGO people, the programme is running well.

For technical reasons of long-term apprehension, experts do not suggest deep tube-wells as means to mitigate arsenic contamination. It does not even guarantee that they will remain arsenic-free for an indefinite period.

Since its identification in early last decade, the flood of funds has hardly improved the situation. Most of the funds were utilised for research and education. Actual mitigation work remained ignored. There might have been one hundred and one reasons. But government and our conscious civil society cannot disown the responsibility for the failure.

Enough research has been done in the country. We should focus on actual mitigation work which should be sustainable. No single method would be suitable for all places. Every individual case has to be treated differently. The most important component after installation of any technology should be its sustainability and monitoring. Villagers should accept it. It needs lots of awareness development.

By the grace of huge publicity in the country and abroad, it is easy to get foreign funds for arsenic mitigation. So a suitable method can be installed in all arsenic contaminated villages of the country. In my experience, there should be a system where villagers will get ready water for drinking as they were habituated to take water from tube-wells in the past. Development agencies or the government should deploy experts in villages for monitoring of the installed system. Otherwise, the device might go high up on their "macha" or might malfunction due to various known and unknown reasons.

As a member of Bimstec but only as a neighbour we are trying to develop closer relations with Myanmar. It may be added that both Nepal and Bhutan are members of Bimstec. It may also be pointed out that as landlocked countries both Nepal and Bhutan deserve special consideration from both Bangladesh and India. We would never suggest to India to accept any proposal detrimental to its interest. At the same time we have to see our own interest. Unless India agrees to reconsider its policy of bilateralism we do not see any prospect for improving good neighbourly relations. If India continues to promote her interest totally ignoring the interest of its neighbour then the existing relation may be adversely affected. The role of Indian media and the attitude of Indian bureaucracy also do not appear to be friendly. In dealing with India, a giant in Asia, it is advisable



Household installation of Chulli water purifier

to satisfy the three pre-conditions (a. Allowing Bangladesh link to Nepal and Bhutan through Indian corridor; b. Allowing import of electricity from Nepal through Indian corridor; and c. Reducing Bangladesh's trade imbalance with India). Unless India and Bangladesh settle these points it is extremely doubtful whether Bangladesh will allow laying down of the gas pipeline for a gain of around US\$125m a year.

Apart from the above there are a number of issues which cannot be solved because of lack of adequate cooperation from India. Generally speaking our experience during the last 31 years (1974-2005) shows bilateral issues can hardly be settled if there is any question of give and take. We have not yet been able to complete the demarcation of border. This is causing great hardship to few thousand Bangladeshis. India is continuing push-in without discussion at political level. Indian border security force is killing Bangladeshis on slight pretences. These problems, as we see, could not be settled through discussion at official level. Without waiting further it is advisable that these issues are seriously considered at high political level.

Bangladesh has been advised by various experts to raise the river water issue at the regional level because this problem, as it appears, can not be solved bilaterally. India is advising us to improve our water management system and go for bilateral negotiation. Through Bangladesh has become independent only 34 years back it is the only state in South Asia which has earned its freedom through great sacrifice. Thus through sheer pressuring it would not be possible for India to obtain benefit because no government in Bangladesh will ever dare to take any decision which may be detrimental to the interest of Bangladesh.

In this tri-nation issue Myanmar's interest should be carefully considered because we are looking forward to develop closer relationship with her. She must be convinced that though we fully appreciate her interest we would not be able to pursue any proposal not acceptable to our people. However, we know that there is no last word in negotiation and as such we shall try to proceed cautiously and carefully in this case.

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line passing through Bangladesh territory without reaching full understanding.

Bangladesh is pursuing a policy of peaceful coexistence right from its independence. Because of commercial, financial, economic or religious considerations she may regard some states more acceptable. To create better and closer understanding among the states of South Asia she visualised the formation of SAARC. She became member of D-8 and Bimstec states to develop better relation with states holding similar view. In principle she has agreed to allow laying of the pipeline in her territory. What she wants in exchange is not unreasonable. She always wishes India well. We wish India appreciates our problems and hindrances. In the ensuing deliber-

ation it may be proper to consider the following points:

(a) Among the three India is a major power of Asia. Thus it would be a nice gesture for India to appreciate the problems of smaller states;

(b) As the aspirant for becoming a permanent member of the UNSC India should not ignore the regional interest involved in the issue;

(c) As India is reported to have shown more interest in SAARC it may be advisable for her to be more attentive to strengthening Bimstec.

ABMS Zahur is a retired Joint Secretary.

Tri-nation gas pipeline : Must be handled with caution and care

ABMS ZAHUR

ATRI-nation (Bangladesh-Myanmar-India) meeting is reported to be held soon to discuss the issue of supply of gas from Myanmar to India through Bangladesh. We are sure as to which of these countries consider the issue as urgent and critical. Apparently, it is India which has become desperate to remove its worry to meet the rapid increase in consumption of energy, particularly due to rapid industrialisation and appreciable improvement in quality of life. Its attempt to obtain gas from Iran through Pakistan has become uncertain because of US objection to such a deal. As we could gather from various sources it appears that India-Bangladesh-Myanmar deal depends on India's desire to agree

to satisfy the three pre-conditions (a. Allowing Bangladesh link to Nepal and Bhutan through Indian corridor; b. Allowing import of electricity from Nepal through Indian corridor; and c. Reducing Bangladesh's trade imbalance with India). Unless India and Bangladesh settle these points it is extremely doubtful whether Bangladesh will allow laying down of the gas pipeline for a gain of around US\$125m a year.

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sacrifice. Thus through sheer pressuring it would not be possible for India to obtain benefit because no government in Bangladesh will ever dare to take any decision which may be detrimental to the interest of Bangladesh.

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