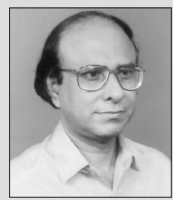


Neo-liberalism: Gathering challenges



QAZI KHOLIQUZZAMAN AHMAD

INEQUALITIES have always existed in the world. But now, at the beginning of the 21st century, inequalities are of totally different magnitude and nature than ever before, and further accentuating. This is indeed ironic, as the world's wealth and technological advancements have reached unprecedentedly high levels. The revolution in information technology has been a key factor behind these advancements. It has also been a vehicle through which information is available all over the world about whatever is happening in one place or another. In combination with tremendous improvements in transportation facilities, particularly air transportation, it has turned the whole world into what is called a "global village" in terms of connectivity, whether that can be accessed by all from around the world is another matter but one of deep concern. The distance between one corner of the world and another has been reduced to hours of travel; and information and money can be transmitted from any part of the world to any other by just pressing a button on the computer. People can download a wealth of information almost on any subject from the internet. However, movement of people is not a component of the so-called on-going globalization. Globalization, therefore, remains only partial; and, for this reason (additionally to other compelling dynamics), it militates against the interest of the developing countries, many of which have great potential of earning foreign exchange by exporting human-power.

Both the global and national socio-economic orders are indeed inequitable and unfair and needless to say that the poor and disadvantaged are at the wrong end. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted in 2000 to eradicate poverty which still afflicts a large proportion of the world's population, mostly in the developing countries. In terms of income,

about 1.2 billion people are extremely poor, having to make do with PPP US\$1 (which is equivalent to Tk.16 or 20 in Bangladeshi currency) per day per person and 2.8 billion people (i.e. just under half the total world population) live on less than PPP US\$2 per person/day. But, the MDG programs are not going anywhere much, given the lukewarm financial and technological support coming forth from the developed world directly

2005) WTO Hong Kong Ministerial. Earlier, we have seen similarly huge, even larger gatherings of people from around the world protesting the inequitable policies of the World Bank, the IMF, and the G-8 in whatever places these organizations have met. Obviously, these demonstrations are not going anywhere much, given the lukewarm financial and technological support coming forth from the developed world directly

respond appropriately to the deprived people's legitimate demands for equitable rehabilitation in the economy and society. The persistence of the problem and the way the deprived have been suppressed cannot but harden their (i.e. the deprived people's) resolve to re-group and re-surge again in future. The knowledge about what has happened in France and how the authorities have behaved to contain the rebellion has spread throughout the world through news networks, including information superhighway. Indeed, people in similar socio-economic conditions as those who rebelled in France preponderate in the metropolitan and rural areas throughout the world, who would surely find a lot of affinity with those who rebelled in France and may be encouraged to act to seek their own legitimate shares of benefits of development and rightful socio-political positions.

Attempts at suppressing such rebellious protests may succeed for a while but that is bound to backfire if the suffering people are suppressed by force without meeting their demands for the legitimate shares. These confrontations may lead to disastrous consequences for all, including the "high and mighty" who do not seem to see beyond their noses from their comfortable positions. What is happening currently around the world is that people belonging to the power structure (social, economic, political, military) support a policy of whatever it takes to contain the upsurge of even peaceful protests, and certainly rebellious protests, of the poor and deprived people. But, only the establishment of new international and socio-economic orders based on equity, justice, and fairness for all can establish peace, security, and stability in the world.

BEHIND THE FACADE

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or through international institutions. At the same time, the poor countries continue to suffer from access problems for their exports to developed economies; and their agriculture, in particular, suffers due to heavy subsidies being paid to agriculture in the developed countries. Thus, the disparity between the poor and the rich countries has been accentuating as has been the disparity between the poor and the rich people within nations in the wake of free market and globalization. The world of the poor is characterized by despair, haplessness, injustice and socio-political subjugation.

Thanks to information technology revolution, inequalities and injustices blazing in one part of the world are known to people in other parts in details directly or through activist networks on different issues. It is, therefore, now possible, as never before, for a global platform of the downtrodden to be established.

Internationally participated protests organized over the past several years against the policies and programs developed and implemented within the framework of neo-liberalism by the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO as well as the G8 countries are undoubtedly efforts to that end. The latest protests were organized in the recently held (December

and inequalities. Indeed, there are protests being held in many developing countries by or on behalf of the downtrodden. All these developments constitute a major challenge to the rich and privileged classes and ultimately to the global and national orders now evolving under the neo-liberal paradigm.

Thus, the genuine demands of the dispossessed under-classes against the usurping upper-classes have begun to find organized expressions globally and nationally. If, indeed, global and national power structures fail to recognize the forces that are emerging in response to their own selfish and greedy postures and action, the instability and tensions faced today around the world will continue to rage and heighten in future, rendering the world a very unsafe place for everybody including the rich and powerful. In rebelling, the poor, jobless, and socially marginalized people of the world will genuinely seek their equitable shares of economic growth and legitimate places in society and polity.

One may recall the anger of the poor and marginalized people, particularly youth, expressed in France recently through rebellious protests. They have been contained by the power-that-be but the problem has not been solved. The ruling classes have failed to

Clearly History has not ended. Francis Fukuyama in his 1993 book *The End of History and the Last Man* claims that free markets and liberalism will last forever as the global paradigm of organizing economic relations and market operations on one hand and political governance on the other and no other principles of economics and forms of government will ever displace it. He is obviously wrong. Ingredients of another History are already gathering strength and momentum around the world.

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Josh tones and suicide bombers

NAEEM MOHAEMEN

"Because of the prohibition of all organisations in opposition to the 'party' of the Shah, the opposition tended to gather in the mosques. This is particularly so for the peasant, the middle class, and even for the merchant class opposition to the regime of the Shah. Because of the failures of the Communist Party and radicals, even to attempt to organise opposition within the ranks of the [Iranian] working class, discontent surfaced at the mosques. Radical sermons were preached, which though cloudy and nebulous, were interpreted by the masses in their own fashion."

Ted Grant, February 9, 1979
VIOLENCE — nihilistic and escalating — is not new to our society which has oscillated between dictatorship and democracy for 34 years. But the nature (suicide bombers) and the source (militant Islamist groups) are perceived to be a "new equation." Evidence points to groups like JMB, but some parts of the puzzle remain unresolved. I abhor paranoid conspiracy theories, but the current crisis will not end with mass arrests and confessions from "JMB cadres." The real puppet-masters remain hidden.

At the same time, responsible activists cannot engage in these debates for too long — because we quickly discover that our government is using the "hidden forces" theory as a justification for inaction. In the interest of pushing this administration to do something, anything, focus has to remain on the factors that are visible and in our control. That is to say: militant groups, unmonitored funding, arms smuggling, and madrasa education curriculum and post-madrasa unemployment.

Pause for a second to consider the psychology of the suicide bombers. Regardless of who has trained them, on an individual level they have rejected the escalating "modernity" project represented by the mushrooming of an aggressive consumerist culture (or you could argue consumerism has rejected them). The militant recruits can't afford to drink Coke, have Josh rings, wear jeans from Westecs. Within their violent, anarchic program (what Tariq Ali calls "Islam-anarchists") is also fury at an economic system that has left them behind.

It is tempting to dismiss militants as "mindless robots." On December 23, I was with a group of activists who were witness to the latest anti-Ahmadiyya rallies by the (now divided) Khatme Nabuwat. It was easy to comfort ourselves by looking at the faces and categorizing them as bribed or coerced. But what about those who truly believe they are in a war against jahiliya, represented by today's Bangladesh? Mere patronizing or stereotyping is not enough to deal

So now we have "factions" within Political Islam: you have Jamaat positioning itself as "good Islam" to differentiate from the "bad Islam" of the militant groups. The ground beneath our feet has shifted dramatically. All debate is happening within the paradigm of Islamist politics. Even secular politicians now feel obliged to quote from the Quran and say, "bombers are doing un-Islamic things." So militant groups have already succeeded — the terrain has transformed to one where political rhetoric is confined within the Islamic framework.



Katabon Mosque anti-bombing rally with this growing faction. These groups are getting stronger precisely because we have provided no alternative. However JMB, Khatme Nabuwat, Harkat-ul-Jihad, Amra Dhakabashi, Allah Dal, Lashkar e Taiba or other groups have sprung up (external funding, internal manipulation, neglect by government, etc.)

The rise of Political Islam is filling the vacuum left by the collapse of progressive politics. Today's left is toothless and fossilized (go to any party meeting and survey the average age of the room). For angry young men who want to fight an unjust society, the only remaining destination seems to be Political Islam. And for those who are impatient even with Jamaat's methodical Islamization program, militant groups offer armed uprisings to speed up the arrival of the Caliphate.

There is an ironic parallel between racial profiling of Western Muslims after 9/11, and our own profiling of Muslim militants. Bearded men in crowded public spaces seem to be cause for immediate alarm these days, as at a recent Public Library film screening where a *musulli* wandered in while looking for the *namaj ghor*. While we support law enforcement stopping militant groups, we must also make sure human rights are not

violated in this process. If we start brutalizing every *madrasa* student as "the other," we will only drive them further into the arms of the militant groups. I was relieved that the recent police action prevented Khatme Nabuwat from attacking the Ahmadiyya mosque. At the same time, I worry that photos of Khatme Shibir cadres who move on to more radical groups, we need to look at the failure of secular and/or left politics that has led to young, angry, poor men looking for answers elsewhere.

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loud chants: "bombaji kore jara/Ismler shotr thara" (those who throw bombs/are enemies of Islam). An emboldened Jamaat just held a mammoth anti-bombing rally in Palltan, advertised by rickshaw mikes blaring "Jamaat e Islami Jindabad!"

So now we have "factions" within Political Islam: you have Jamaat positioning itself as "good Islam" to differentiate from the "bad Islam" of the militant groups. The ground beneath our feet has shifted dramatically. All debate is happening within the paradigm of Islamist politics. Even secular politicians now feel obliged to quote from the Quran and say, "bombers are doing un-Islamic things." So militant groups have already succeeded — the terrain has transformed to one where political rhetoric is confined within the Islamic framework. If Islamist politics is the all-encompassing box, the JMB bombings can benefit Jamaat as the "moderate" Islamists that speak "against" bombings. Recall a time in the near past when Jamaat meant Shibir which meant *rajakar*, *rog-kata* and *ramda*. Now all those signifiers of violence and intolerance have been neatly transferred from Jamaat to groups like JMB. Even the anti-Ahmadiyya movement, which was Jamaat's first success in 1950s Pakistan, is now linked to Khatme. Jamaat's militant, street action model of the past has now been taken up by newer groups, and they are free to reinvent themselves as "tolerant democrats."

As the debate bounces between "good" and "bad" Islam and the left fades out, the politics of economic justice have been obliterated. To give only one example, thousands of workers were fired when Adamjee Jute Mills closed down, but newspapers were dominated by debates over Arabization of Zia airport, French hijab ban, Ahmadiyya Muslims, and Guantanamo Quran desecration.

In the middle of an unprecedented crisis, we are still stuck with the motifs of *hartals*, statements, blame games, and stalled investigations. BNP is already cornered by the current situation, but AL doesn't understand that if the country collapses, they won't be able to run it either. If a third force emerges that no one can predict or control, Bangladesh could turn into an international war zone. Unless we wake up to the need for national unity to stop the militant groups, even this far-fetched scenario could come true. If that happens, we will be living in a country where all the wrangling about strikes, parliament boycott, and caretaker government will seem like relics of a more innocent time.

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Containing the menace of sea piracy

COMMODORE MD KHURSHED ALAM NDC, PSC, BN (RETD)

THE international seafaring community has always been romanticised by writers and film makers and many people harbour visions of bearded renegades sailing across the blue seas, something akin to a maritime Robin Hood. The truth is that present day piracy, of whatever form, is violent and is made more fearsome by the knowledge on the part of the victims that they are on their own and absolutely defenceless. Modern piracy has become the global enemy of trade and commerce and depriving the international shipping of freedom of seas. There has always been piracy where ships would be boarded usually at night and alongside a ship underway. Then armed gangs would start attacking ships at berth or at anchor for cash, cargo, personal effects, ship's equipment, and in fact anything, which can be moved. Another violent form of piracy has emerged in South East Asia involving the hijacking of a ship underway, overpowering the crew and stealing the entire cargo. Finally, there have been several instances where ships were stolen for not so much what they contained; the objective was to use the ship by giving it a false identity and turning it into a phantom ship.

The explosion of maritime piracy in Southeast Asia and waters off Somalia remains a serious threat to international commerce and safety in modern times. Roughly 45 percent of the world's commercial shipping moves through the region's waters and the frequent attacks on commercial vessels passing through the SE Asian region can hamper international trade and lead to severe economic loss. Significantly, such attacks in the region have caused an estimated \$16 billion in economic loss over the past five years. International Maritime Bureau (IMB) that tracks incidents of maritime crime throughout the world, reports the emergence in Southeast Asia of a 'new brand of piracy' in which the attacks are motivated by political agendas rather than a traditional motive to rob.

In South Asia, Bangladesh and Indian waters are also reportedly plagued with piracy. Not only that the increasing nature of the piracy attacks and the inability or unwillingness of the countries in the area to act decisively against pirates for many years is also alarming. It is a known fact that in the waters of Indonesia, Malaysia and the Malacca Strait region 103 attacks were reported in 2002 out of total worldwide attacks of 370. In 2002, a total of 32 piracy attacks, the second highest, were reported in the ports of Bangladesh. In 2001, the figure was 25 for Bangladesh while India recorded 26 attacks. In 2003 the number of attacks all over the world rose to 445 with 189 in SE Asia and Bangladesh again ranked the second with 58 attacks. There were 325 attacks on shipping in 2004 around the world with the biggest improvement in Bangladesh, having only 17 attacks, while the Indian ports registering 15 attacks. There were, however, already 14 attacks in Bangladesh waters and 12 attacks in Indian waters till 30th Sep 2005. There were no such attacks in the waters of Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

While regionally Bangladesh is in the second most piracy prone zone in the world the international community reports rampant piracy in our ports of Chittagong and Mongla. These ports have been labeled as 'vulnerable and insecure' by foreign ships. This has forced foreign shipping companies to impose additional charges for discharging cargo resulting in higher costs for export and import. These figures clearly establish how far our failure to tackle the issue has rendered our territorial waters/ports unsafe for the international maritime and commercial activities.

The IMB is a part of Commercial Crime Services, the division of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), dedicated to fighting all types of commercial crime. Alarming outrage in the shipping industry prompted the IMB to set up Regional Piracy Reporting Centre in Kuala Lumpur in 1992. The Centre is financed by voluntary contributions from major shipping and insurance companies of Greece, Italy, Japan, Kuwait,

There is urgency for taking actions by Bangladesh to exercise existing enforcement powers fully in preventing and eradicating piratical activities through enacting appropriate domestic laws to further pave the way for tougher and effective enforcement mechanism.



Norway, Russia, UK, Thailand and Singapore etc. Any master of commercial vessel can now directly send the piracy reports to the Centre

and that makes them independent of justifying the veracity of reported incident of piracy by going through the Port Authority or any govern-

ment authorised channel. As Bangladesh waters did not enjoy good image, many a time false reports have been made by the

masters of vessels. In most cases our authorities were not quick to respond in correcting the misreports; as it appears there are hardly any government body with clear cut responsibility to counter those reports.

Along with this some Indian writers are also projecting Bangladesh as the most piracy prone country. They normally select many reports of so called piracy from our dailies, like the reported incident of fish worth of \$50,000 hijacked near Sunderban, pirates carrying automatic weapons boarded 27 fishing trawlers near Bhola, a gang of 10 to 11 pirates boarded a passenger vessel and looted the valuables after beating the passengers and injuring twenty in the Meghna river, pirates threw 13 crew overboard near the coast of Patuakhali, police found 16 bodies of fishermen in the ice chamber of the boat FB Kausera, who died of severe cold etc. These reported incidents in our waters do not fall under the classical definition of piracy. Some of our reporters unfortunately use the word 'piracy' for any theft/crime committed in the waters of the rivers/lake/coastal waters. They tend to forget that the word 'piracy' has legal international connotation and we should be careful in reporting incidents of theft of fish or looting of cash etc happening in the water with the word 'piracy'.

Piracy became a crime under International law as seafaring became prevalent and international trade became a major part of economy of all the states. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, (UNCLOS) 1982, entered into force in 1994, defined Piracy as consists of illegal acts of violence or detention or any act of depredation, committed on the high seas, for private ends, by the crew or the passengers of a ship against another ship, persons or property on board such ship. It simply means

that under the UNCLOS 1982, piratical acts are committed on the high seas i.e. beyond 200 nautical miles from the baseline/coastline of a state and the requirement that the acts be motivated for private ends restricts this definition to attacks committed with the intent to rob. All the countries of South Asia have ratified the UNCLOS 1982.

After the attack on board the Italian cruise liner 'Achille Lauro' in 1985, the UN and its International Maritime Organisation (IMO) promulgated the convention on the 'Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation' referred to herein as 'The Rome Convention 1988'. It made it unlawful to seize or take control of a ship by force or threat of force, to perform an act of violence against a person on board a ship if it is likely to endanger safe navigation of that ship, to destroy or damage a ship or its cargo if it is likely to endanger safe navigation, to place devices or substances on a ship that are likely to destroy that ship, to knowingly communicate false information to a ship that would endanger safe navigation and to injure or kill any person in connection with any of the above acts.

Unlike UNCLOS, there is no assumption that non-signatories would be bound by the terms of the Rome Convention. None of the reported incidents of piracy in the ports or coastal waters of Bangladesh can be termed as piracy according to the UNCLOS. International Chamber of Commerce/International Maritime Bureau (IMB), however, defines piracy as an act of boarding or attempting to board any ship with the intent to commit theft or any other crime and with the intent or capability to use force in the furtherance of that act. Even this definition of piracy excludes petty theft unless the thieves are armed.

However, there is no room for complacency in taking shelter under the definition of Piracy since the incidents of theft are happening in our waters of the ports. Although it is heartening to note that our maritime forces — the Bangladesh Navy and the Coast Guard — have earned unique distinction of reducing such thefts in our waters and the IMB has

also been appreciative of our efforts in witnessing a decline in figures in the past three years. The present economic activities of Bangladesh greatly rely on the Sea Lines Of Communication (SLOC) passing through our territorial waters as well as the high seas. We have two major seaports directly involved and contributing to the significant economic development. The recent developments in the coastal waters of Bangladesh clearly demand that concerted actions from the agencies of the government are necessary to curb or stop the piratical incidents in our coastal/port areas.

India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have already ratified the 1988 Rome Convention and the UNCLOS. Where our regional allies under the SAARC have taken the matter seriously, what reasons could there be in not acting to the demands of the hour? If Bangladesh ratifies the Rome Convention as it has done with the UNCLOS, it would not only provide headway to enact adequate national laws on piracy, it would also provide all the incentives to forge a regional piracy co-operation agreement among the key countries within SAARC. We have to understand that long years of neglect have made the territorial and adjacent waters of Bangladesh somewhat unsafe for maritime navigation.

If our maritime forces/law enforcing agencies do not prove to be more effective, if the government agencies do not take measures to introduce new legislation to ensure safety of navigation within the coastal areas and if our journalist community are not careful in future, it is not very far that the persons, agencies and companies involved in international maritime seafaring and commerce would turn their back against us. So there is urgency for taking actions by Bangladesh to exercise existing enforcement powers fully in preventing and eradicating piratical activities through enacting appropriate domestic laws to further pave the way for tougher and effective enforcement mechanism.

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