

One China policy and Olympic 2008

Now that the Olympics is approaching, they are using all their might to sabotage it. While no government has so far announced a boycott of the Olympics, some leaders are toying with the idea of staying away from the opening ceremony. This will be most unfortunate, and we condemn such a move. We urge the international community to stand united against all attempts to undermine the Olympics.

M MAHBUBUR RAHMAN

CHINA is, indeed, a great country, with 5000 years of recorded history. Ancient China was the centre of world civilisation, and the seat of knowledge, wisdom and culture for millennia. Even our Prophet Muhammad 1500 years ago instructed people to travel to China to seek knowledge. China, especially in recent decades, has achieved tremendous progress and development in all spheres of national life. It has turned out to be the most vibrant nation, a great economic powerhouse, a nation most confident and determined, and is unabatedly surging forward. China watchers appreciate that, with the present pace of development, by 2030 it will be the largest economy and greatest economic power, overtaking US. This phenomenal development of China was achieved through peace, socio-political stability and harmony. It has very high maturity, prudence and vision.

China has wise leadership -- sincere, honest and most dedicated. It is the fourth generation of leadership which is now steering China, from Mao Xedong to Deng Xiaoping, from Deng Xiaoping to Jiang Zemin, from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao. The transition of leadership has been very smooth, taking place through the National People's Congress (the Chinese Parliament) and according to the Chinese constitution -- reflecting the hopes and aspiration of the

Chinese people.

China followed a policy of pragmatism and extensive reform. It never went into conflict or disharmony with the hopes and aspirations of the people, and never pursued abrasive, hard-line policies disturbing the peace and harmony of the community. It adopted a policy of "one country two systems," which enabled Hong Kong and Macao to return to it. China believes in peaceful reunification with now separated Taiwan. It believes that the same policy of "one country two systems," and peaceful negotiations, will get Taiwan to return to China.

Taiwan, of course, throughout history, was an integral part of China, except for a period when it was occupied by Japan and later by the retreating Kuomintang army of Chiang Kai Shek. The world recognises China's one China policy, and accepts that Taiwan is an integral part of China. Bangladesh strongly upholds China's one China policy, and believes in re-unification of Taiwan through peaceful means.

Now, about the Tibet issue. The manner in which events have unfolded recently in Tibet suggests that this was no happenstance. It was undoubtedly pre-planned, well calculated, and motivated. Large-scale attacks on non-Tibetan ethnic groups unleashed looting, burning and destruction. James Miles of the Economist, who returned from Tibet, confirmed that this was pre-planned and

orchestrated. To quote from his CNN interview: "What I saw was calculated, targeted violence against an ethnic group, I should say two ethnic groups, primarily ethnic Han Chinese in Lhasa but also members of the Muslim Hui minority in Lhasa."

Chinese embassies and consulates were attacked in several countries almost simultaneously. A section of the international media went into overdrive. They saw demons where there were none. Violence was labeled as peaceful demonstrations. The most fundamental journalistic ethic, the principle of truth, was totally violated at will. Spreading rumours to tarnish China's image and undermine the coming Olympic Games is certainly motivated. Only two weeks before the March riots, over two hundred Dalai Lama supporters took off from his headquarters in Dharmashala on a long march to Lhasa.

Claiming that Tibet was a nation occupied by China, the Tibetan government in exile has proposed a charter of Tibetans in exile to establish a so-called federal, democratic, self-governing republic in the Tibetan region. Such activities are meant to destroy China's national unity, and are obviously supported by those who have their own axes to grind with China.

But why this stirring up of conflict between the Huns and Tibetans? The Dalai Lama has said several times in the past that Tibet was a part of China. He also said that Tibetans should live with the

Chinese, and that it was good for Tibet's development and its people's welfare. Geographically, Tibet is a difficult terrain. Economically, it has long been neglected and backward. In recent decades, keeping pace with other regions of China, Tibet has made phenomenal progress in agriculture, industry, road and rail communication, infrastructure and education.

The central government is pouring huge amounts of funds into the region. In the past five years, it has given 95 billion Yuan (\$13.5 billion) as aid and subsidies for special development. Since 2001, government enterprises and ministries have initiated 2876 medium and big-sized projects towards Tibet's development. People of all ethnicity live in peace and harmony in Tibet. Old Tibet, a most impoverished, most underdeveloped, most remote region of the past has, today, turned into a prosperous vibrant and developed new region with quality of life, education and culture.

We have observed that ever since Beijing won the chance to host the 29th Summer Olympic Games, efforts have been underway to use the event to boycott China under whatever rationale. China, a country with more than a billion people, is one of the largest recipients of gold medals in the Olympic games, and one of the top achievers in almost all disciplines of games and sports, has been aspiring to host the game since the 1990s. I was president of the Bangladesh Olympic Association then. We strongly supported China's bid to host the Olympics in 1996, 2000 and 2004, but there were international conspiracies to unjustly deny China this honour and prestige which she deserved most.

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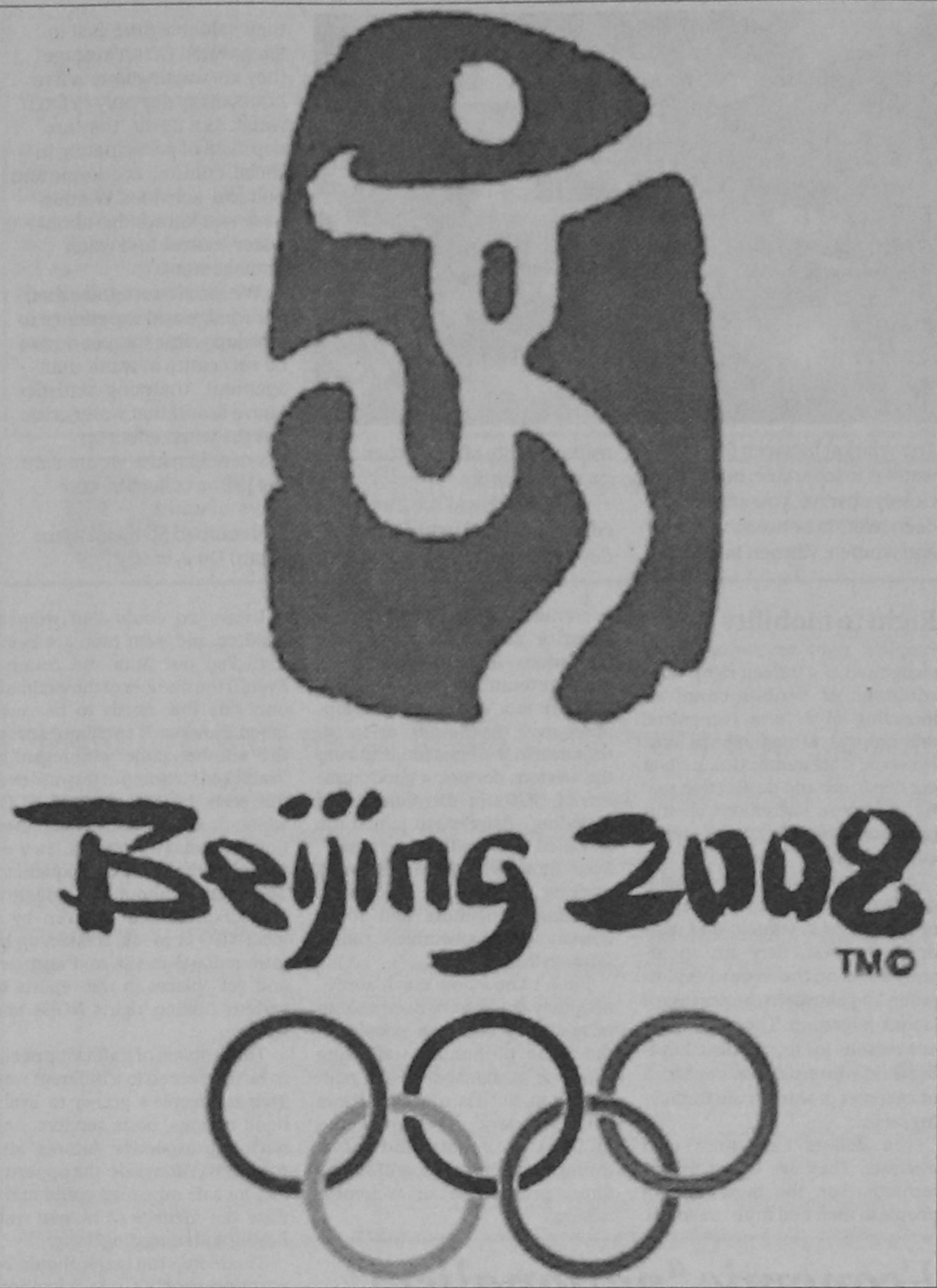
their might to sabotage it. While no government has so far announced a boycott of the Olympics, some leaders are toying with the idea of staying away from the opening ceremony. This will be most unfortunate, and we condemn such a move. We urge the international community to stand united against all attempts to undermine the Olympics.

It is a lofty, solemn international event that should never be spoiled by nasty politics. China strongly believes in, and plays a dominant role in, fostering world peace and stability. It champions the cause of amity, equity, human justice, harmony, understanding and togetherness. The motto of Olympics 2008 is, rightly, "One world-One dream," and the sports-loving world is very happy to see that China is spearheading the mission.

China is our friend, a friend in need, and a friend indeed. China is our neighbour, and our development partner. We admire China. We value China. We attach special emphasis to our relationship, which is many millennia old. China's contribution to world peace and justice, and its role in harmony and stability, has earned it honour and respect in the committee of nations.

We strongly believe that no conspiracy, no mischief can divert China from its noble goal and lofty ideals, and we stand firm with the regional and world community beside China in her quest for world peace and harmony. We look forward to seeing a strong, united and developed China playing her continued effective role, and making contributions to the peace and progress of the world and human civilisation.

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Asia hit by soaring rice prices

Analysts fear that throughout Asia the poorest will suffer most and go hungry. In these countries many families spend more than 70 percent of their income on food. With the substantial increase in rice prices right across Asia, they cannot buy enough food to feed their families. Government subsidised rice, or international aid programmes are their only saviours.

LARRY JAGAN

FOOD prices are continuing to sky-rocket throughout Asia, causing many governments to intervene to try to stabilise their domestic rice prices for fear of acute shortages in the future. Many aid agencies working with the region's poorest people, including the UN's World Food Programme, are increasingly worried that food shortages and price rises will severely affect their food assistance programs.

Rice -- the staple product across the region -- is the main concern, as its price has doubled over the last two months, and continues to rise. Many exporting nations have implemented bans and restrictions on exports to try to dampen local market prices.

Panic buying, rationing and hoarding are increasing alarmingly, fuelled by fears that rice and other food-stuff may run out soon in many Asian countries, despite repeated government calls for calm.

"I am worried about the price of rice -- if it continues to increase I won't be able to buy it because I just won't have enough money," said Pong Sothy, a 22-year-old waitress in Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh. "Last month my

money ran out half-way through the month because of price rises. So I had to borrow to survive. I just cannot keep doing that."

"We are buying as much rice as we can now because we do not trust the government to make sure there is enough rice for the ordinary people to buy after Thingyan (next week's water festival that marks the New Year)," said a retired civil servant in Burma's commercial capital, Rangoon, Kyi Kyi. "Already it's difficult to get enough for our family meals and donations to the monks during the Thingyan festival. We know for sure that the price is going to jump soon -- it's already risen significantly since last month."

In Bangladesh and Pakistan, there are long queues of people outside government stores, waiting in lines for hours to buy cheap government-subsidised rice in small 5-kilo packs. In Thailand, cheap, government-supported packets of rice are on sale, but the major supermarket chains have rationed their sales to three 5-kilo bags per person to prevent panic buying depleting their stocks too quickly.

From the Philippines to Pakistan, from China to Indonesia, the fears are the same -- food shortages and hunger. "As

prices go up in the world market many millions of people across Asia will face food shortages and possible starvation," Paul Risely, WFP's regional spokesperson told the Daily Star.

It is the most vulnerable who are at risk of hunger and starvation. "Malnutrition is almost certainly going to rise significantly in many of the poorest parts of Asia," Action Aid's international director, Jon Samuel told the Daily Star.

Already, the number of people at risk of hunger or starvation in Asia has more than doubled, according to the WFP. "In Nepal alone the number of vulnerable people has jumped from four to eight million in the last six months as a result of the market price increases and related factors," said Tony Banbury the regional head of WFP. "That's 30 percent of the population that are in acute need of assistance."

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programmes are their only saviours.

But even these food assistance programs are now at risk because of the price rises and shortages. "Our school feeding programs in Cambodia have been effectively suspended," said Thomas Keusters, the head of WFP operations in Cambodia. Schools are on vacation now because of the Khmer New Year holiday, and will re-open in two weeks time. "Effectively there will be no school feeding program for the rest of the academic year, affecting 450,000 children in grades 1 to 6."

Supplies of rice to WFP bought in the local market have stopped. Five suppliers have now defaulted, and WFP are short of 13,000 metric tonnes that they need for their programs over the next six months.

Rice importing countries are also particularly alarmed at the rising price of exports, and the increasing difficulty of securing stocks on the international market. World stocks of rice have fallen to their lowest since the early 1970s.

Bangladesh, the Philippines and Sri Lanka are all desperately trying to buy fresh stocks of rice at a time when many exporting nations have banned or restricted their overseas sales. Cambodia, Egypt, India and Pakistan have banned exports of rice, while China and Vietnam have cut exports dramatically. As a result, the export price for rice has soared to astronomical heights -- up to three times as expensive as it was three months ago.

The Philippines has only secured half its immediate needs from Vietnam, around 300,000 tonnes, and is expected to bid for more in the coming weeks. Manila is expected to tender for up to a further million metric tonnes, according to one of Thailand's leading rice exporters, Vichai Sriprasert.

Bangladesh has managed to secure some 400,000 tonnes of rice from India -- which has exempted some small quantities of rice for export on humanitarian grounds. Burma has also pledged to supply Dhaka with up to 500,000 tonnes.

Earlier this week, Burma agreed to supply Colombo with 50,000 tonnes of rice shortly, at the very

favourable price of \$ 400 a tonne, according to a spokesman for the Sri Lankan government, Anura Kumara. Sri Lanka is also getting 32,000 tonnes of rice from India and Pakistan in the near future.

But Asian governments remain nervous that the soaring rice prices will fuel political and social unrest. "The massive food riots in

the Haiti capital this week are a wake up call for all Asian governments," according to Action Aid's John Samuel. "If immediate measures are not taken, like protective price and effective distribution mechanisms, there is likely to be food protests here too."

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No one wants to sell

Equality versus justice

Is there a contradiction in terms between equality and justice? Sometimes it is argued that inequality, especially if it is removed by force, may infringe on the principle of justice. The opponents of equality -- economic or gender -- invoke nature and natural justice in support of their argument.

HABIBUL HAQUE KHONDKER

IS there a contradiction in terms between equality and justice? Sometimes it is argued that inequality, especially if it is removed by force, may infringe on the principle of justice. The opponents of equality -- economic or gender -- invoke nature and natural justice in support of their argument.

When intellectuals such as Dr. Hameeda Hossain and others remind us of the constitutional

obligations of equality in gender relations in Bangladesh, certain opponents -- not necessarily confined to obscurantist clerics -- suggest that what is important is "justified rights" (*najjyo adhiakar*) and not "equal rights" (*shomo adhiakar*). In various sermons and waz mahfils (religious lecture sessions) some Mowlanas insist on *najjyo adhiakar* and not *shomo adhiakar* for women by giving an analogy: "You can give 2 yards of cloth to a man for a pajama. Can you give the same

amount of cloth to a woman for a saree? No, she has to be given more in this case; say, 5 yards -- that is *najjyo adhiakar*. Ergo, justified rights are more important than equal rights."

For many, this seems like an infallible justification. Then, of course, there are others who insist that nature created inequality, by showing that the five fingers of a hand are not equal -- why should we, then, accept the argument of social equality? Isn't inequality natural? For many men (and, per-

haps, some women) these are convincing arguments.

Let me closely analyse these two analogies.

First, we must be aware of the "tyranny of analogy." Analogical reasoning is one of the means of obtaining knowledge, but it has its own inherent limitations.

There are false analogies as there are just ones. False analogies help legitimise propaganda or unverified statements. Behind falsehood and unverified statements lurk vested interests.

In the first analogy, the problem begins with using the need of a man as the yardstick for allocation or distribution. This is not unusual in a patriarchal society. I will start with the need of a woman as the starting point, and argue that a

woman needs at least five yards of cloth to cover her body. Hence, she should be given five yards of cloth; and men would be given the same, i.e., five yards, so that they could have a pajama and a shirt and, if so desired, a cap made with that cloth. No one will feel aggrieved. Here equality and justice coincide.

The main principle of distributive justice is fairness, not enforced equality. In times of food crisis, governments have opened food distribution centers for the poor. Here, the principle of equal distribution means equal distribution among those who are unable to buy food in the market. The rich section of the people cannot feel aggrieved and invoke the equality principle here.

Moreover, the assumption that

men should wear only a pajama and nothing else denies their rights to clothing and decency. In fact, the basis of allocation must take into account the objective basis of the need situation as well as the availability of the resources.

Now let us turn to the argument of "inequality of five fingers." One of the most interesting and enduring features of nature is difference, not inequality. The earth has mountain peaks as well as wide and deep oceans; glaciers as well as deserts. In the biological world, variation of species is the name of the game. Variation ensures survival and beauty.

Equality does not mean dissolution of differences or variations. Variation or difference, for example, the biological difference

between men and women ensures perpetuation of the human species.

Inequality is the creation of society, not of nature. Society does not mirror nature. They are interrelated but separate domains. In nature, tigers eat goats and goats eat grass. That does not mean that in human society those who have power must destroy those who are powerless.

Social inequality is a reality. So is robbery. What is real is not always acceptable. We make choices about what to accept and what to reject, social norms make the distinction between what is acceptable and what is not. Once slavery was acceptable, now it is not. The problem of slavery has not disappeared, but it is practiced only in violation

of the laws of the society. The women and men who make up society are endowed with free will. We have the choice of using our free will, our different abilities and talents, to make a better society or live in the conditions offered to us by nature.

Since the time we decided to walk out of the caves to the road towards civilization the search for good society has not ended. The journey, as well as the quest for good society, will go on. In this quest, good arguments based on sound reasoning, not false analogies, will help us achieve our goals.

Long live difference; down with inequality.

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