

Climate change and human rights

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ATIQ RAHMAN

GLOBAL climate change has emerged as the greatest threat facing humankind today. The long arm of climate change impacts is likely to undermine various fundamental human rights and basic securities. These rights and securities include the right to life, food, safe water, health, home, land, properties, livelihoods, employment and development.

Climate change affects almost all ecosystems, societies and economies. But the effects are different, depending on their location, economic status, history of development and governance patterns. The poor in developing countries would be most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and extreme climatic events such as frequent and prolonged floods, cyclones, tidal surges, salinity intrusion, sea level rise and drought. Climate change will increase global poverty and human insecurities (food, water, health, energy, shelters and social securities), enhance regional disparity and violate sets of basic human rights if urgent actions are not taken now by the global communities.

Climate change, sea level rise and the associated risks may displace over 200 million people in the near future. This will increase the number of climate refugees, particularly in the small island states, low

lying deltas and the developing world, which will again enhance rural to urban migration and international migration. The internally displaced people (IDP) and externally displaced people will create new socio-political instability in many parts of the world. Millions of poor are already living in urban slums in Asia, Africa and Latin America without employment, adequate income, food, water, shelters and basic amenities. The extreme climatic events and sea level rise will push millions of displaced to the city slums and thus violate their set of human rights including right to food and water, right to development and right to live in their own societies and culture.

Climate extremes and enhanced insecurities

The enormous, forceful and devastating cyclone Sidr that hit the coast of Bangladesh on November 15, 2007, not only killed over 10,000 people but also devastated the lives and livelihoods of over 30 million people. The next devastating cyclone Nargis generated in the Bay of Bengal spared Bangladesh but severely hit the Myanmar coast on May 4, 2008, killing more than one hundred thousand people and injuring millions. Most recently, cyclone Aila hit the coasts of Bangladesh and India on April 25, killing over 300 people and displacing thou-

sands. Many people of coastal districts were made homeless for weeks and suffered from serious food and water insecurity. Thousands of them were thrown into extreme poverty. Diarrhoeal diseases spread amongst many affected communities.

Thus, the poor in the developing countries are the worst affected by those climate extremes, they are in the forefront of climatic disasters and have very little capacity to cope with the risks. Currently, over 860 million people are suffering from severe food insecurity and chronic malnourishment. About 95% of them are in developing countries. Inequitable access to food is the major factor behind this, but global warming and climatic events are also contributing to food insecurity.

Climate refugees and migration

The frequency, intensity and impacts of climatic and natural disasters have increased in recent years, and possible sea level rise will affect low lying and coastal countries. Millions of people will be displaced from their homes, occupations and livelihoods, and many will be thrown into poverty by increasing salinity and sea level rise across the world. Bangladesh is already experiencing higher level of tidal inundation in the coastal districts. A 45cm rise will not only affect the vast coastal ecosystems and hamper agriculture and food production, but may also dislodge about 35 million people from 20 coastal districts by the year 2050. Bangladesh is already an over populated country. The climate refugee will create new housing and settlement problems as well as enhance competition and conflict for scarce resources including land, water, fisheries and forests.

Key challenges and urgent actions

Climate change is a result of unequal development and consumption, and is enhancing inequity across the world. The impacts are also unequally distributed, where the poor in developing countries are becoming the victims. Mitigating climate change, eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable and equitable economic growth as well as political stability demand concerted and coordinated efforts. To ensure that the rights of the vulnerable communities are protected, emission of greenhouse gases (GHG) must be reduced urgently and immediately. The key challenges for all of us are:

- To stop climate change through urgent mitigation measures and create effective framework for post 2012 commitment with greater participation of both developed and developing countries;
- To explore how to live and adapt in a warmer climate, which will be unavoidable and more risk prone; and
- To promote low carbon sustainable economic development and modify the life style of the rich, who do the most harm through luxuries and over-consumption;
- In addition, to address the issues of threatened rights and securities the following urgent actions are required:
- To support the vulnerable communities with food, shelter, safe water and health services;
- Planned migration of the displaced populations, both internal and external;
- The developing nations must formulate appropriate strategies and plans to address the rights of emerging climate refugees based on the prin-



Even nature can take away their rights.

cipal of "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities."

- In the not too distant future, a separate protocol on climate migrants and refugees will need to be developed to ensure their fundamental rights; and
- Stronger actions on mitigation, adaptation, finance and technology transfer will be required to reduce the number of affected people as well as to ensure their fundamental rights.

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Bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Germany

Both Germany and Bangladesh share common views on many international issues in the UN and in other international fora. They have maintained and developed close and friendly relations in a wide range of fields.

HARUN UR RASHID

THE Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies (C-FAS), a foreign policy think-tank in Dhaka, hosted a farewell lunch for the departing German Ambassador H.E. Frank Meyke on July 14 at a local hotel. The chairperson of the C-FAS, Ashfaqur Rahman, who was once Bangladesh ambassador to Germany, and German Ambassador Meyke highlighted the salient features of bilateral relations between the two countries.

Germany is an economic power as well as an important member of the European Union (EU). It is the largest economy in the European Union.

Germany is a reliable partner of Bangladesh in development cooperation. Since independence, German churches and numerous non-governmental organisations (NGOs) made tremendous efforts to promote the social and economic development of Bangladesh. German assistance to Bangladesh is received in the form of development efforts, trade and cultural cooperation.

Both countries have a long and successful bilateral relationship on most international issues. Germany always emphasises the democratic characteristics, governance issues and development process of Bangladesh.

After establishment of diplomatic relations on February 4, 1972, the bilateral relations between the two countries began to grow steadily both in depth and dimension.

Between 1972 and the end of 2005,

Bangladesh received approximately 2.4 billion in commitments from Germany as part of bilateral financial and technical cooperation, in addition of the funds provided by Germany to the European Union, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the UN. These funds stood at 4.4 billion, or Tk.39,600 crores.

Since 1978, all German funds provided as part of government level cooperation have been in the form of non-repayable grants.

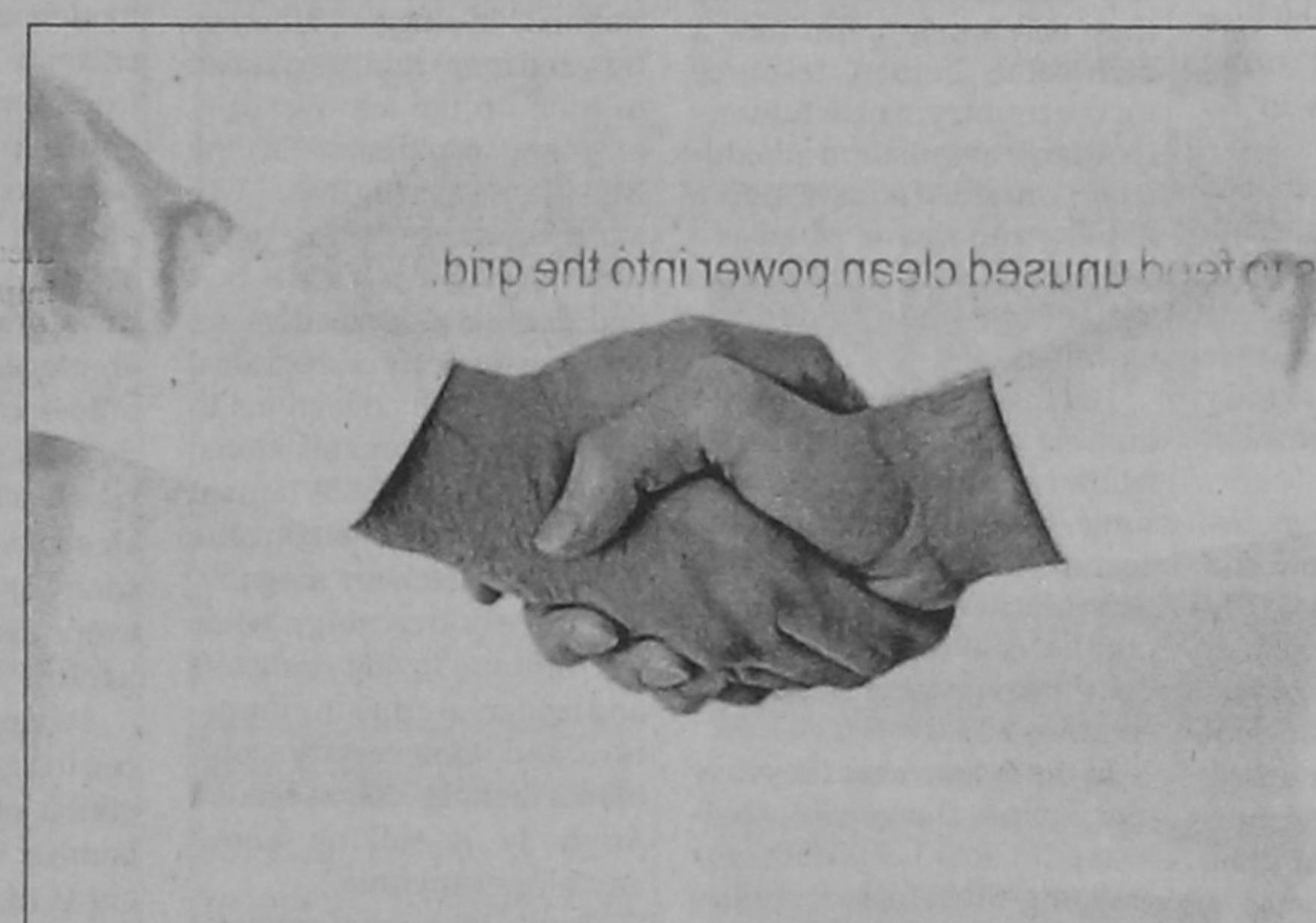
Bangladesh is a priority partner country of German Development Cooperation (GTZ). By an agreement between both the government adopted in May 2004, the activities of the GTZ focus on three priority areas - healthcare including family planning, economic reform and development of the market system through promotion of private sector, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and renewable energies.

Among the other ongoing projects, the promotion of legal and social empowerment of women in Bangladesh can be mentioned. The sustainable economic development program of GTZ contributes to the competitiveness of the readymade garments (RMG) sector, as well as other export-oriented sectors like silk, leather and jute.

A German-Bangladeshi investment promotion and protection agreement has been in force since 1986, and a bilateral double taxation accord since 1993.

In trade with Germany, Bangladesh has for years recorded a large surplus.

Germany is the second largest export



Cooperation benefits both parties.

market of Bangladesh after the US. In 2008, the volume of bilateral trade reached almost 2 billion, and overwhelmingly in Bangladesh's favour.

In the first months, Bangladesh exports to Germany in 2006 amounted to 1.56 billion as compared with imports in the same period of only 305 million.

During the first four months of 2009, Bangladeshi exports to Germany increased by 27.5% compared to those of 2008. About 94% of the exports from Bangladesh to Germany are ready-made garments, and the imports mainly comprise machinery, chemical and electrical goods, and medicines.

So far, German direct investments in Bangladesh total almost 60 million. The Bangladesh-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BGCCI) acts as a business platform and mediator between both the countries.

A promising field of Bangladesh

exports to Germany is ships, with already more than 30 ships worth about 250 million (Tk.2,400 crores) on order by German shipowners.

German investment in Bangladesh could increase if the rules and regulations of local investment were clear, transparent and interpreted by local courts within a limited framework.

Another new dimension of German assistance is with regard to the use of renewable energies. GTZ will provide funds and assistance for up to 380,000 solar home systems and 60,000 domestic biogas plants in remote areas until 2012.

Another source of renewable energy is wind power. Geographically, Bangladesh is blessed with a constant flow of strong monsoon winds. It has a 724 km long coastal belt, around 200 km hilly coastline and about 50 islands/islets in the Bay of Bengal.

The strong south/south-westerly

monsoon wind, coming from the Indian Ocean enters the coastal areas of Bangladesh from March to October. This wind increases in speed over the V-shaped coastal regions in Bangladesh, as research shows. Germany may provide Bangladesh technological know-how on how to convert wind-power into energy.

The cultural relationship of both the countries is very strong. Cultural cooperation is mainly channelled through the Goethe Institute, which sponsors local and German cultural activities. Bangladesh has traditional and historical connections with Germany.

Exchanges between the German and Bengali people have been taking place for over a century. Many Bangladeshi intellectuals take a keen and informed interest in German literature, art, architecture and philosophy. Folk music, such as Baul, has been very popular in Germany and a group of Baul singers was sponsored by Bangladesh Embassy sometime in the '90s.

In Bangladesh, the Goethe Institute is the main meeting place for all those interested in Germany. It offers a broad variety of cultural events through film-workshops, film-presentations, seminars and lectures on socio-political subjects as well as on aspects of contemporary arts, theatre performances, and exhibitions of German and Bangladeshi artists.

Last year, it introduced an innovative program, called "Schools: Partners for the Future," in which Oxford International School and South Point School were included. Currently, teachers of the partner schools are in Germany to continue their German language course, which they started in Bangladesh in January.

There are increasing contracts amongst German and Bangladeshi artists, primarily in fine arts, photography, films and theatre. Bangladeshi artists have been able to hold exhibitions in German galleries and museums. A number of visual artists from Bangladesh have

also made Germany their new home.

Germany continues to promote the restoration of historical monuments, archaeological research and the unique legacy of the Bengali catamarans. Since 1981, a cooperation agreement has been in place between Radio Bangladesh and Deutsche Welle (DW).

Bilateral commerce and trade are continuing, although there is considerable scope for greater engagement. Bilateral relations got some momentum through several high level visits, contracts, and political and economic dialogue. A nine-member German parliamentary delegation visited Bangladesh in February 2004.

Both Germany and Bangladesh share common views on many international issues in the UN and in other international fora. They have maintained and developed close and friendly relations in a wide range of fields. The two countries are held together by their commitment to various sectors mutually agreed upon, which is expected to be strengthened further in future.

Broad-based discussions with major development partners are critical in understanding the role they play in the economic growth of the country. In many areas, such bilateral relations develop on the basis of agenda crafted abroad and grafted in our development program with the consent of our government of the day. The activities of such partner countries also require close understanding by our general public.

The Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies, by arranging such events in the non-government sector, will help in informing the general public about the useful role of our foreign friends. Our media too can play an important role in this public diplomacy.

Banister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

The minister of blame



US citizen Rebiyer Kader started the recent street-fight in China's Xinjiang province, despite the fact that she was on the other side of the world, fast asleep.

The Dalai Lama threw the first stone in Tibet 18 months ago despite the fact that he was cutting his toenails in a bath in India, oblivious to anything but his bunions.

And Falun Gong founder Li Hongzhi is behind every action done by his followers, despite the fact that there have been fewer sightings of him than Elvis.

The writers of editorials in government newspapers in mainland China should really get the Man Booker Prize for Fiction.

But other people play shift-the-blame too. In Sri Lanka earlier this year, Tamil Tigers shot at escaping hostages and issued daily news releases blaming the people trying to free them.

Once got a press release from an undergarment company blaming global warming for its failure to meet its sales targets.

Fortunately, we, the public are intelligent enough to make up our own minds about important things.

No, wait, what am I saying? We, the public are so stupid we think Miley Cyrus makes music.

All governments like to spin the news their way, but the prize for imaginative blame-attribution must jointly shared by the People's Daily and the Central Propaganda Department in Beijing. If there was an Olympic prize for the furthest distance blame can be shifted, they'd win the gold.

What are these folk like at home? Here's how I imagine the scene.

It's 6.30 pm. The Minister of Blame

comes in.

His wife barks angrily at him: "You left your dirty socks on the floor. I told you to put them in the laundry bin."

He retorts: "It's not my fault. It was the Americans."

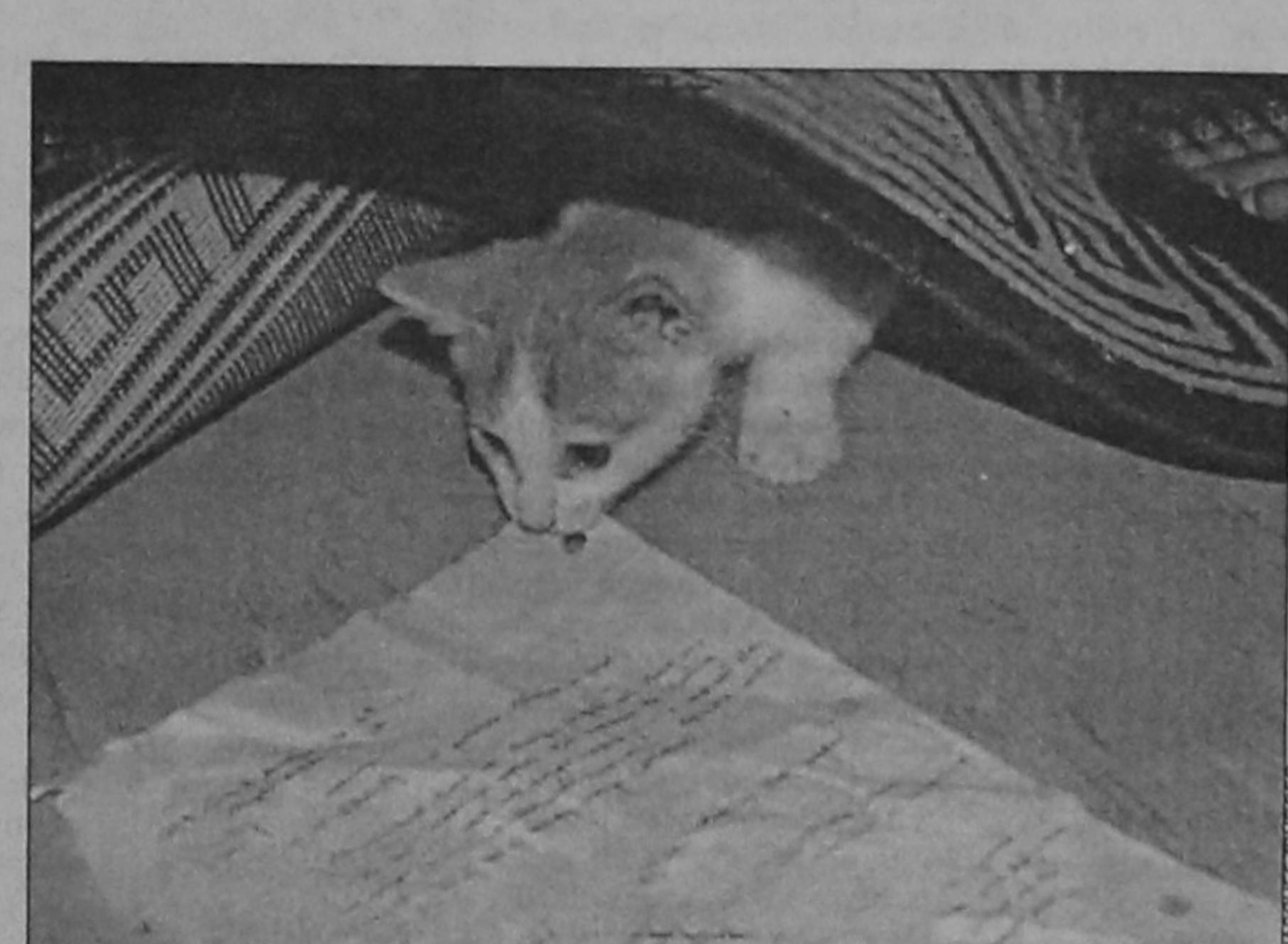
His wife puts her fists on her hips. "The Americans are in America. Your socks are on the floor by your bed. How can it be their fault?"

He sighs in a condescending manner to express his amazement at the depth of her naivety before explaining: "America has sent secret agitators to China. The Dalai Lama personally broke into our home to disarray our laundry basket."

But tonight his wife is not taking any bull: "First, the Dalai Lama is not American, and second, where's your evidence?"

The Minister, skilled in these matters, responds calmly: "All non-members of the Party are American lackeys by default. And I cannot reveal my evidence because it's a state secret."

Wisely, she changes the subject. "I hope



The cat ate my homework.

you remembered to pick up some rice on the way home like I asked you to."

The Minister looks momentarily stricken, but quickly recovers himself. "No, but it's not my fault. I could get no rice, thanks to the British."

She awaits an explanation with a this-be-good expression on her face.

Fortunately for him, it is good. "Er, the British halted rice distribution to distract me from the fact that they are backing Rebiyer Kader's riots in Urumqi."

His wife is puzzled. "But everyone in that fight was of Han or Uyghur race."

The Minister confides: "Ms. Kader's main supporter is Britain's Queen Elizabeth, who has 100% Uyghur blood."

He goes into the bedroom. "Hey, whose socks are these? Have you had a visitor in here?"

His wife smiles. "It's a state secret," she says.

For more on how to blame others visit our columnist at www.vittachi.com