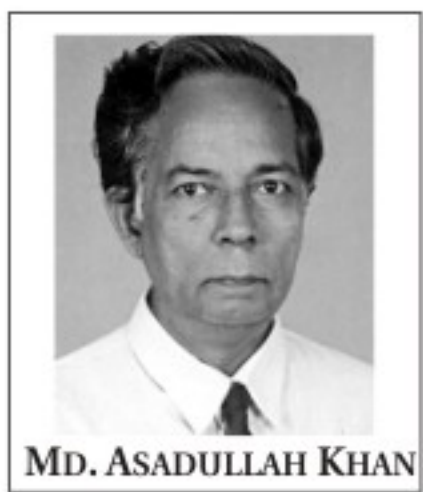


BITTER TRUTH



So goes the Indian prophecy:
*Only when the last tree has been cut,
Only after the last river has been poisoned,
Only after the last fish has been caught,
Only then you will find,
That money cannot be eaten.*

THE Amazon is a library for life sciences, the world's pharmaceutical laboratory and a fly-wheel of climate," says Thomas Lovejoy of the Smithsonian Institute. Such may be said about the Sundarbans as well. Many facts regarding the forests are unknown because of the lack of interest and research funding needed to make these discoveries. In the Brazilian part of the Amazon rain forest, an estimate by US Academy of National Sciences in 1982 states that a typical 4 square mile of the patch of forest may contain 750 species of trees, 125 kinds of mammals, 400 types of birds, 100 of reptiles and 60 of amphibians. Each type of tree may support more than 400 insect species. The forest region in Bangladesh or in Brazil is an untapped storehouse of evolutionary achievement that may prove increasingly valuable to mankind. However, biologists see it vanishing before our eyes. The reason: deforestation. Further, deforestation has devastating effects on climate change and other natural processes upon which the earth's delicate balance depends. Brazil, home to about half the Amazonian basin, has shown reckless penchant for squandering resources. Al Gore, a conservationist and former US vice-president after having visited there states: "The devastation is just unbelievable. It's one of the great tragedies of all history." Damages, through breaking up forests into isolated patches, or when setting fires, directly threaten biodiversity. While covering only 6% of the earth's land surface, the world's forests are losing an area of half the size of Bangladesh each year. With other rich environments under assault, the extinction rate of species is rising everywhere. Not all threatened species disappear immediately. Most suffer loss of their habitat ranges and gene pools

to dangerously low levels, eventually descending to what biologists call the "living dead." Throughout the world, 976 tree species are classified as critically endangered.

Undeniably true, humanity's food supply comes from a narrow sliver of biodiversity. Throughout history, people have gathered about 7,000 plant species for food. Today only 20 species provide 90% of the world's food with maize, wheat and rice; supplying more than half.

Natural pharmaceuticals offered by biodiversity are also underutilised. Only a few hundred wild species have served as our antibiotics, anticancer agents, pain-killers and blood thinners. Caught in an endless struggle for survival, these species have devised myriad ways to combat microbes and cancer causing runaway cells. As the mainstay of agriculture and medicine becomes the mainstay for the survival, there is hardly an alternative to conserving the forest.

Furthermore, the biosphere gives us renewed soils, energy, and the very air we breathe -- all free of charge. The forest plays a role in recycling most of the nutrients and much of its moisture. It is such an efficient recycler that virtually no decaying matter seeps into neighbouring rivers.

Left to its own device, the forest is an almost self-sustaining system that thrives indefinitely. But when stripped of its trees, most of the forest soil becomes nutrient-poor and ill-suited for agriculture.

The story is the same, even Bangladesh. The government in the past days, in a bid to encourage settlements in the Chittagong hill districts, offered many incentives, allowing settlers to claim arable land by clearing off



PHOTO: DREK NEWS

trees. Unfortunately for the settlers, their dream of agriculture-based prosperity turned into a bitter disappointment.

Because of the huge volume of clouds it generates, the forest system plays a major role in the way the sun's heat is distributed around the globe. The Amazon alone stores about 75 billion tons of carbon in its trees, which when

burned, spew carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Since the air is already overburdened by carbon dioxide from factories, cars etc., torching our forests could magnify the greenhouse effect. If this trend continues the globe will warm up catapulting, dramatic climatic changes.

Shrimp cultivation, logging, agriculture in forested areas and insecticide use are some of the major causes of forest destruction in bio-rich areas. In Chittagong, several thousand acres of coastal land, including Parabon (man-made forest) have been encroached upon to create enclosures for shrimp cultivation, which increases salinity and so can inhibit growth of trees that depend on fresh water. With increase of salinity, mangrove forests in the Sundarbans are dying off. In the coastal water there, a section of the fishermen use insecticide in the water to amass bigger catches, which adversely affect the growth of forest resources.

Shockingly, in Bangladesh, the direct assault by humans on forest resources goes unabated. Landless farmers in Shyamnagore, Kaliganj and Bagerhat invade forest lands to earn a living. Hill districts in the Chittagong region and other areas are monitored to build housing for the country's burgeoning population. True, time and again, forest have defied the prediction

The shadow of 1971

DR. AKMAL HUSSAIN

WHEN the military government in 1971 committed atrocities against the people of East Pakistan, it undermined the legitimacy of the very state it purported to defend. In West Pakistan the state's propaganda machine was deployed in the familiar whipping up of public opinion into a frenzy that was fuelled by a combination of misguided notions of religious "purity" and ethnic prejudice. The Bengalis, who at the time constituted the majority of Pakistanis, were demonised as a seditious ethnic group soiled by Hindu influence. The consequent failure of the people of West Pakistan to rise up in mass protest ruptured the fabric of humanity that gives cohesion to society and ennobles national consciousness. The people in post 1971 Pakistan did not come to terms with the crimes against humanity that had been committed, and this cast a shadow on the national psyche. The displacement of human values from the practice of governance gradually eroded the institutional structure of society and state, since democratic institutions are underpinned by the norms and values of civilisation.

The essential factor in the debacle of 1971 was the fact that a military government was in power. It chose to use military force as a response to what were essentially political demands of the majority, following the electoral success of the Awami League led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The mode of use of military force, unconstrained by considerations of professional discipline, law or morality, was because of a gradual degeneration of the military since its involvement in politics following the Ayub Khan coup d'état of 1958. This fact is clearly articulated in the published version of the Hamoodur Rehman Commission Report (as declassified by the government): " ...one of the major causes of our disgrace was the moral degeneration which had set in among senior military commanders as a result of their continued involvement in Martial Law duties right from 1958."

The Commission identified the main allegations of "excesses" committed by the Pakistan Army, some of which are: "excessive use of force and firepower in Dacca during the night of 25 and 26 March 1971;" "...senseless

and wanton arson and killings in the countryside during the course of sweep operation..."; "killing of intellectuals and professionals like doctors and engineers..."; "killing of East Pakistani civilian officers, businessmen and industrialists ..."; "raping of a large number of East Pakistani women ..."

The Hamoodur Rehman Commission compiles evidence on the allegations through statements by senior military officers. For example, General Niazi in referring to the period prior to his posting testifies: "Military action was based on the use of force primarily and at many places indiscriminate use of force was resorted to ..." Brigadier Shah Abdul Qasim states: "Excessive force was used on that night. Army personnel acted under the influence of revenge and anger during the military operation. Major General Rao Farman Ali, adviser to the Government of East Pakistan testifies: "Harrowing tales of rape, loot, arson, harassment and of insulting and degrading behaviour were narrated in general terms..."

That a professional army could descend to such depths shows what happens when an organisation is divorced from its moral moorings. Since 1971, the Pakistan Army has been reconstructed as one of the finest fighting forces within its technological constraints, in the world. The basis of its fighting capability is the discipline, strength of character and moral integrity that are inculcated during the training process of soldiers and officers alike. The lesson of 1971 is that the military must neither govern nor should it be used against its own people. The operations in Balochistan over the years, as indeed repeated military interventions in the political sphere since 1971 make one wonder whether the lessons of East Pakistan have been learnt.

In the civilian sphere the lesson of the 1971 tragedy is the importance of establishing rationality and universal human values in the institutional structure and political behaviour. The first step in rectifying the degeneration of politics in Pakistan would be to offer an apology to the people of Bangladesh. As a citizen of Pakistan I humbly do so now.

The writer is a leading Economist, and Distinguished Professor of Economics, Forman Christian College University, and BeaconHouse National University, Lahore.

| The New York Times **EXCLUSIVE** What to do, and not do, about North Korea

ROBERT L. GALLUCCI

THE death of North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-il, and the ascendance to power of one of his sons, Kim Jong-un, creates some opportunities and potential traps for the administration and senior leaders in the United States things they should be sure to say and be sure not to say.

First, we should recognize that we have been here before. Sort of. In 1994, I learned of the death of Kim Il-sung in an early morning telephone call from the South Korean foreign minister. I was in Geneva leading negotiations with the North Koreans over their nuclear weapons program. The first question in the minds of those in Washington and Seoul was how the transition of power in North Korea from father to son would change things whether the negotiations would continue, whether it would be business as usual or the beginning of a crisis. We preferred the former and, as it turned out, so did the North. The talks continued and an agreement was signed that stopped the North's plutonium production until we abandoned the deal eight years later, because of the North's cheating with uranium enrichments technology.

We may be as fortunate this time, even though this son is a lot younger and less experienced than his father was when he assumed authority. The traditional mourning period in Korea is a year, and even Kim Jong-il, who was by then a familiar figure in North Korean power circles, took almost that long before assuming all the leadership positions his own father had held. The lesson here is patience: We should resist drawing conclusions too soon about who is really in charge in North Korea.

Heading the "do not say" list for any American leader, or would-be leader, is that this is the time to promote or provoke regime change in North Korea. We used to hear a lot about regime change about a decade ago, with reference to the Axis of Evil, and now the phrase is being resurrected to capture the urge to get rid of North Korea's horrendous totalitarian government.

There may never be a good time to openly advocate the overthrow of the government in Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, and certainly the moment when a new young leader may have to decide whether he needs to prove his leadership prowess is definitely not the right time. Insisting on regime change now, as Mitt Romney came very close to doing in a statement on Monday morning, creates no incentive for this government to even consider negotiations, or to contemplate backing off or ever giving up its nuclear weapons program. It is just plain dumb.

What does make sense is to continue to deplore the humanitarian catastrophe that is life in North Korea and to say that we would welcome the day when the government in that country moved toward democratic governance and a free economy.

that they were doomed. But the dangers are now real as these dangers accelerate at a devastating rate.

The Sundarbans here span about 6,000 sq km, including a water area of 1,700 sq km. There is hardly any doubt in the researcher's claim that there might be hidden a variety of life forms that are yet to be catalogued in this forest. Researchers rarely investigate these areas. Yet loggers have reached there, destroying the very resources that support human life.

Happily, scientists, environmentalists and media persons have journeyed to the endangered areas to marvel and despair at the immolation of these forest resources. These committed groups have become front lines in the battle to rescue the earth's endangered environment from humanity's destructive ways. "Save the Forest" -- long a rallying cry for conservationists -- is now being heard from the politicians as well.

Sadly, the movement has sparked a confrontation between rich industrial nations, which are fresh converts to the environmental cause, and the poor third world nations, which view outside interference as an assault on their sovereignty, creating a stalemate in biologically diverse and forest-rich regions of the world.

The destruction of rain forest in Amazon or the mangrove forest in the Sundarbans portends an incalculable disaster for all of us on this planet. Most tropical and mangrove forests are distinguished by their canopies of interlocking leaves and branches that shelter creatures from the sun and wind. If the forests perish, so will more than 1 million species -- a significant part of the earth's biological diversity and genetic heritage.

Researchers estimate that if the current rate of habitat destruction were to continue in forests and coral reefs, half the species of plants and animals will be gone by the 21st century. Our descendants will inherit a biologically impoverished and homogenised world. Not only would there be fewer life forms, but also faunas and floras would look much the same around the world, with disaster species such as fire ants and house mice widely spreading.

Humanity would then have to wait for millions of years for natural evolution to replace what was lost in a single century. Then again the climate change may have already extinguished the very resources on which human life depends.

The writer is a Columnist for The Daily Star.
Email: aukhandk@gmail.com

Among the first things we should tell the North is that we remain prepared to enter discussions aimed at halting, rolling back and ultimately dismantling its nuclear weapons program. This may sound like old news, but it is not. The Obama administration has been sensitive to the domestic political needs of its ally, South Korea, which demand that before proceeding to talks, the United States should obtain some acknowledgement from the North of responsibility for the deaths caused by the sinking of a South Korean ship and the shelling of a South Korean island. The president's advisers have also been sensitive to anticipated criticism from Republicans that initiating talks with the North would represent appeasement, would demonstrate naïveté, would amount to buying the same horse twice and would teach the North the wrong lesson.

In the past, the administration has been too sensitive to these domestic considerations. It should now seize an opportunity, if one opens, to resume talks about ending North Korea's nuclear weapons program. To do so would not be appeasement, because little would be given without the North's performance. It would not be naïveté, since we well understand the North Korean mentality. And it would not be a re-purchase because the last time we talked, we did get much of what we paid for, and we should now be prepared to finish the deal.

Moreover, we should not be in the business of teaching other governments lessons. We should adopt the best policies to protect our national security. Right now, that means entering a serious discussion about the North's nuclear weapons program, aimed at its dismantlement.

Finally, there is an opportunity for the administration to tell the North Koreans something hard and realistic that they desperately need to hear during a transition to new leadership: The United States will not tolerate the transfer to another government or terrorist group of any nuclear weapons material or technology or fissile material, and we will respond with devastating consequences for the North if we learn of such a transfer.

The North's role in the secret construction in Syria of a plutonium production reactor in 2007 should have crossed a red line for the Bush administration. It apparently did not. Had it not been for Israel's version of a nonproliferation policy aerial bombardment of the site the Middle East might already have been fundamentally changed by the North's outrageous move. Our security is endangered by any such transfers, which make nuclear terrorism and the loss of whole cities entirely plausible. Our government needs to make sure the new government in North Korea never attempts such transfers again.

Robert L. Gallucci is president of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and was the chief negotiator with North Korea during the administration of President Bill Clinton.

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