

# Hesitation on the Way to Multipartyism

by Ogen Kevin Aliro

Three decades into independence Africa is going through its toughest years. As 1990 came to a close, rioting took place in Morocco, famine came again to Ethiopia and Eritrea, the government in Chad fell to rebels, and Rwanda foiled an invasion. Almost every country was being affected politically by the harsh economic climate or political events in Europe. In this second article Gemini News Service completes the analysis of where Africa stands at the dawn of 1991.

## Priority to Education

In their meeting with Begum Zia on Wednesday, the leaders of APSU expressed the hope that her government would give priority to education. We are heartened to note that the BNP leader pledged to do so. To say that our education system is in need of serious reforms is to understate the problem. It has needed such reforms for quite some time. The question is, will such reforms be forthcoming under the new government? Every aspect of our education system requires urgent attention — educational policy, planning, infrastructure, training, syllabi, test book production, quality of teachers, maintenance of the educational calendar and finally the seriousness of our students.

Many of the above problems are technical and will require experts to look into them. But some others are political and can be solved with a sincerity of purpose and a commitment for Bangladesh's development. Begum Zia, her party and APSU have the necessary commitment. The challenge is to implement it. In this regard APSU can once again play a pivotal role by leading the students towards a new commitment to quality education, in the primary, secondary and higher levels.

The role of education in the future development of Bangladesh should be clear in the minds of the BNP and APSU leaders. Its role is central. It is education that creates the human resource, the appropriate intellectual environment, the motivation and the openness to technology that leads to creativity, innovation and dynamism that moves a society forward. It is well known that Japan's educational reforms during the period popularly called the Meiji Restoration, more than a century ago, was one of the principal reasons for her subsequent success. It was Republic of Korea's investment in education starting from late fifties till today that brought about its spectacular success. Similar experiences can be gathered from Taiwan and Singapore. More recently the economic success of Malaysia and Thailand, closely followed by that of Indonesia can, to a large extent, be attributed to the seriousness with which these countries pushed forward their mass and higher education.

Sometimes it is said that Bangladesh is too poor to invest adequate resources in education. What is perhaps more true is that Bangladesh is too poor NOT to invest adequate resources in education. If we are to break out of the poverty cycle; if we are to be able to increase employment, income and productivity, we must educate our people. Since our most abundant resource is human beings, the only way we can tackle our mass poverty is to equip them to be more productive and venture into new areas of activities.

If we want to attract foreign investment, the only way for doing so is to develop our human resource. Higher cost of labour in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and elsewhere in SE Asia may likely drive foreign investment in our direction. We must be ready to receive it. The international community — World Bank, Unesco, Unicef, UNDP, bi-lateral donors and private foundations — are all willing to help Bangladesh in this regard. The question is, are we ready and willing to help ourselves?

## Let Ramna Live Again

There is something very definitely wrong with the Ramna Park. It has been so for quite some time now. It is good to see a group of responsible persons calling attention to the gradual degeneration of the park. These call for action to prevent further decay of the park should be heeded by the appropriate authority without any more loss of time.

Dhaka, cute little town in colonial India. There some parks in city even then. Coronation Park, just by the Buckland Bund promenade was the greenest and, unfortunately for the people of the Naya Bazar area, Sirajuddowlah Park was the barest — and during the Second World War it was reduced to all trenches and nothing beside. It never recovered from that violation. The Dhaka residents hardly felt the absence of properly kept parks as the whole of the New Town or the Ramna area was an unbounded park.

From fortyseven to fiftysix it is not much of a span in time terms. But for Dhaka it was the start of a cancerous growth. The sleepy Eden College area, hedged around by avenues of wonderful Arjun trees was transformed into the hub of the city with the college housing the secretariate of the new provincial government. M.A.Jabbar, the PWD chief and founder of the Institution of Engineers, perceived a threat in that growth to the proverbial quality of life of Dhaka. And he started on the job of creating what ever since then has been known as Ramna Park. The work was greatly helped by the presence of the old and lovely little government nursery just across the road. Unfortunately it was again some engineers who killed this dream of retreat and erected the Sarak Bhaban on its grave.

From the late fifties to the early seventies this was about the only park in the city. In seventythree work on transforming the DCCR horse-racing course into the present Suhrawardy Udyan started. That was a gift from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the residents of Dhaka that will hopefully endure well into the next century.

However, that shouldn't have occasioned a fall in attention to the Ramna Park. For many years it doesn't seem to have any supervision and control. It seems to be as uncared as can be — what with suspicious characters making a regular haunt of it. The hundred-and-odd year old serpentine — the so-called lake — around which the park was created goes a mile everyday to being a pit of unhealthful heavy liquid, in spite of the laborious digging of the whole thing only some time back.

Ramna Park, by any standard, is a national asset. It not only has to be preserved, it has to be helped to live. Only then can we hope to live ourselves.

There are no signs that 26 years of human rights abuse by Malawi's President Hastings Kamuzu Banda and his Malawi Congress Party (MCP) are about to end. In October, the organisation Africa Watch provided new evidence of abuse, notably the police killing of more than 20 protesters in Lilongwe last March.

All dissent is systematically suppressed and detention without trial is the regime's major weapon against any form of criticism. This has forced all opposition into exile, leading to the recent formation of the People's Liberation Army of Malawi (PLAM).

In Zimbabwe, 1990 opened with President Robert Mugabe insisting on his vision of the one-party state following his re-election to a third five-year term last March. Mugabe declared himself a strong disciple of the one-party system, telling the West to go to hell and stop promoting multiparty politics in Africa.

But widespread opposition to Mugabe's move eventually forced him to put it off. At the August Politburo meeting, 21 of the 26 members stood against the plan.

In Tanzania, President Ali Hassan Mwinyi was re-elected for the second five-year term — his last, since the constitution has been amended limiting presidential tenure to two terms.

A lively, open debate is raging about press freedom and possible multipartyism to compete with the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), the only legal party in Tanzania.

In Uganda, President Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) has extended its interim term by five years to 1995, to give the movement time to implement its programmes.

Museveni's political opponents accuse him of perpetuating himself in power and have challenged him to lift the ban on party politics imposed when he came to power in 1986. He has asked his opponents to give their views to the Constitution Review Commission.

A draft constitution should be ready by 1992 for debate by a constituent assembly before final approval by the national assembly in time for general elections in 1995.

In North Africa, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Niger and Chad have shown few signs of reform or move to political pluralism. After December riots in Morocco that killed 30 the government pledged social

and pay improvements.

Colonel Muammar Gaddafi remains firmly in control of Libya and is still seemingly popular with his people, while in Mauritania Colonel Maouya Taya carries on terror and ethnic purges.

Elsewhere, it is also business as usual. Captain Blaise Compaore, who toppled and killed Thomas Sankara in 1987, rules on in Burkina Faso with no plans for general elections or return to civilian rule on his agenda.

In Egypt, parliamentary elections were boycotted by the main opposition parties on the grounds that the electoral system favoured President Hosni Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP) which won.

Algeria held local council elections, the first open to opposition parties, on June 12, following a series of violent anti-government demonstrations led by Islamic fundamentalists.

The contest was between the newly legalised Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and President Chadli Benjedid's Front

de Liberation National (FLN) after its 28 years of unchallenged rule. The results were a vote of no confidence in the FLN.

The FIS won majorities in 55 per cent of Algeria's 1500 local councils, the FLN only 32 per cent. The 13 per cent was shared out between the smaller parties.

After 28 years of suffering from FLN incompetence, corruption and arrogance, the voters firmly rejected it in the first chance they were given. This was in a sense harsh for Benjedid and his reformers who, since the riots of October 1988, have been putting in place the very political and economic reforms which have now brought about the FLN's downfall. He could well be the Gorbachev of Algeria.

The latest figure to challenge the political hegemony of the FLN as it totters towards disintegration is its founder and first Algerian president, Ahmed Ben Bella. He returned in September after 10 years in exile and launched a new party, the Movement for Democracy in Algeria (MDA).

After their prize take in the local elections, the FIS is now a serious contender in the parliamentary elections brought forward from 1992 to early 1991 — the elections that will for the first time take opposition parties into parliament, and probably with a big majority.

In neighbouring Tunisia, local council elections were also held in June. Tunisian fundamentalists boycotted, along with all legal opposition parties, and most of the unauthorised ones too.

Facing opposition in only 19 of 246 councils, the ruling RCD took 98 per cent of the votes. The turnout was officially put at about 80 per cent, a figure few observers found plausible.

As the magazine Middle East put it: 'Tunisia's non-elections provided the clearest possible contrast to events next door, in Algeria... Tunisia's caution means that the country is now if anything going backwards in the North African race for democracy...'

Algeria's experiment with democracy is so far the most

exciting and far-reaching in Arab Africa. The changes are as profound as any in eastern Europe. That could well explain why neighbouring governments, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Morocco are more nervous than ever before about their own fundamentalists.

In the Indian Ocean island state of Seychelles, President France-Albert Rene has maintained his grip since introducing the 1979 one-party constitution that gave monopoly of power to his Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF).

His intolerance to dissent sent opponents into exile, where the opposition groups are now based. Former President James Mancham formed a new party in London and challenged the President to call general elections open to opposition parties 'to keep in step with the great things... happening in the world today.'

Mauritius, Senegal, The Gambia and Botswana remain Africa's showcases that democratic pluralism is possible without bloodshed. For instance, in Botswana both president and parliament are elected in free and fair elections.

The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) has remained in power since independence in 1966, but there is a healthy opposition by the Botswana People's Party (BPP) and the Botswana National Front (BNF).

# Political Stability Needed for National Development

by Helal Uddin Ahmed

ITS well established a fact that social cohesion and economic development of a country are linked to the state of affair in its political arena. Political scientists have conclusively proved that there exists a direct relationship between political stability and overall development of a nation. Their findings may be summarized as follows:

a) Economic growth is directly related to political stability. b) Economic stagnation or chaos is inversely related to political stability. c) Integrity and cohesion within a society is a direct function of the degree of stability in its political system. d) Social disorder and the resultant insecurity is a direct outcome of political instability. e) The more stable a political system is, the more likelihood there is of a balanced development in all the strata of society. f) Political stability gives rise to a sound bureaucratic system, it ensures accountability and the services delivered are more welfare-oriented. g) For transition to a higher state of economy (such as from a non-industrialized to an industrialized one) political stability is a must. h) For cultural affluence and growth in other social overheads such as education, communication etc. political stability is a prerequisite. i) Rapid growth of institutional and infrastructural framework of a nation is aided by the stability in its political system.

Let us now see what implications these findings have in our context. Bangladesh is a country which has passed through innumerable upheavals and turmoils beginning with the days when the Aryan invaders set foot on this land of Banga. At no time could any form of political stability crystallize in its soil. The land was 'ours' but the rulers were aliens. For a nation striving hard to assert its identity it was a sad beginning. The Aryans were followed in succession by the Sultans, the Turks from Fargana and last of all the British Raj. It was a cavalcade of invaders set to loot and plunder the riches of a defenceless nation. The very identity of the nation was time and again trampled and molested and what left behind was a legacy based on exploitation of the weaker classes and repression of the poor. We could not develop culturally because it's very foundation had a crisis of identity, and laid on it were bricks some-

times alien, sometimes of suspect origin.

We could not build our economy because the humble structures on its foundation were blasted by the invaders who remodelled them only to repeat the feat.

So all these long long years what we lacked was a political system sound, strong and stable, capable of discharging its duty as a guarantor of statehood, protecting the people's identity and culture, providing them with social security and emancipating their economy through mobilization resources. What we lacked was a system stable enough to rally round and strive for prosperity. Until the masses identify themselves with the system which brings together the societal fragments and gives shape to the political entity called state, it is unlikely that they will work for advancing its cause. Until they realize that the state machinery is ready to cater to their needs and remove the imbalance, inequality and disparity that exist, we cannot expect the masses to rally round the machinery and join hands for overall development. In the light of the preceding when we analyze the developments in world political history, two facts emerge clearly. Firstly, for national growth and development, there must exist a political system stable enough to sustain the onslaught of time, and secondly, the system should be credible enough to convince the masses of its necessity. The measure of credibility is not merely tall talks or slogans, but deeds which are concrete, verifiable and visibly effective.

Let us again focus our attention on Bangladesh, more specifically since the day we earned our independence. Initially the moral was high, foreign aid was flowing in like tides in the high noon, and the stage was all set for a Herculean effort to re-build the country. Hopes rose even higher when the late Bangabandhu returned from Pakistan to take the reins in his own hands. But within a short time

the dreams were all shattered. Suddenly we discovered that the Sonar Bangla of the legends was indeed not all that golden. Morally we were inconsistent, politically we lacked the drive and initiative and economically we did not have sufficient resources. What resulted was political blunders, chaos and confusion, and ultimately a bloody changeover. In this difficult situation a new saviour emerged in the shape of Ziaur Rahman. But tragically

his reign was also cut short just when everything appeared to be moving towards a right direction. The ugly face of autocracy, deception and dictatorship stepped into the scene and the country was dragged, bullied and thrown into a long spell of political uncertainty, turmoil, intrigue and foulplay. It was another nine years before the dawn of democracy could once again descend on our soil.

It is time that politicians,

right and left, red and green, realize that fraud, anarchy, deception and friction cannot do any ultimate good to a country, either in the short or in the long run. They create political instability, loosen cohesion in the social fabric and act as bad precedent for the future. We must take lessons from our history because we simply can not afford to ignore them any longer.

Tolerance is the essence of democracy. What can be solved through

negotiation and dialogue need not be solved through friction and violence. Politicians belonging to all camps and all shades of opinion should look into the consequences of their action shelve their petty party lines whenever the situation dictates and decide on a joint course which is best for the present and the posterity.

Let the tragedy that surrounded the Biblical tower Babel act as a reminder for us of the need to understand each other's language, the need for cohesion and consensus — if we are to build a tower of our own. Let the flag of democracy that we have hoisted after so many years of pathos and pain continue to flatter uninterrupted spreading the message of tolerance, tranquillity, discipline and peace — the virtues without which we cannot survive.

# Aquino Govt Succeeds in Hiking Tax take

Manolo B. Jara writes from Manila

IN 1989, the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) was assigned by the Aquino government a tax-collection quota of 79.8 billion pesos (US\$2.8 billion). With that goal, the BIR had to collect taxes at the rate of 154,000 pesos (US\$5,500) per minute of its working time.

The BIR, one of the two biggest revenue-raising agencies of the government along with the Bureau of Customs, not only achieved that goal; it overshot its target by 2.2 billion pesos (US\$78.6 million) and collected a total of 82 billion pesos (US\$2.9 billion).

Last year, the government increased by about 25 billion pesos (US\$892 million) BIR's tax-collection target to 104.9 billion pesos (US\$3.7 billion). This meant the agency had to raise 201,000 pesos (US\$7,100) per minute of its working time.

As of last December 22, BIR's total collection reached 103.8 billion pesos (US\$3.7 billion), or just 1.1 billion pesos (US\$35.7 million) short of that goal. A BIR report, made available to *Depthnews*, however, said it could have reached that target were it not for the long Christmas holidays.

'I'm almost sure that if there is any shortfall, it will be minuscule or less than 1 per cent of our total goal,' says Revenue Commissioner Jose Ong.

A Finance Department official agreed, saying: 'One per cent or less shortfall in collection is not important and is [often] ignored.'

## Agency not only reaches targets in revenue collection but also increases number of taxpayers

Commissioner Ong also noted that the BIR had to cope with obstacles that tended to impede its tax-collection efforts for 1990. The first is natural calamities, notably the July 16 killer earthquake and the two destructive typhoons that wrought havoc on the country last year.

Another is a tax measure approved by Congress which not only changed the system of taxing oil products but also reduced by 30 per cent the tax rates. 'This measure accounted for our losing 1.2 billion pesos of excise taxes on oil products in the last quarter

of 1990,' Commissioner Ong says.

The improvement in tax collection has been accompanied by an increase in the number of tax filers and paying tax filers, according to Commissioner Ong.

He says that when he took over the BIR in 1988, there were 2.2 million tax filers and

1.4 million paying filers. The following year, the number of tax filers rose to 2.4 million and the number of payers to 1.8 million.

'From these figures, it is readily seen that while there was an increase in filers of 200,000 in the succeeding year, there was also a corresponding increase in the paying tax filers of 400,000,' he says.

Commissioner Ong adds: 'This means that even assuming that all 200,000 new tax filers are taxpayers, there were 200,000 more out of the old

tax filers who are now paying taxes.'

At the same time, he disagrees with criticisms that the increase in number of tax filers to 2.4 million in 1989 was no achievement at all. These critics cited figures indicating that there are 14 million Filipinos who are 'statistically employed' and thus, should be required to file their tax returns.

Not true, argues Commissioner Ong. The number of individuals who are required to file tax returns and those required to pay taxes 'is not necessarily determined by the population or by the number of persons employed,' he says.

Most of the 'statistically employed' Filipinos are not subject to tax because they are categorised as living below the poverty line. Commissioner Ong says. A family of six with a total monthly income of 6 thousand pesos (US\$214) in Metro Manila is considered below the poverty line.

These include, he says, bootblacks, newspaper peddlers, street hawkers and local domestic helpers. Although they are 'statistically employed,' most are not required to file their tax returns because they are not earning enough. — *Depthnews Asia*

## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### The Queen's pet

Sir, I am greatly sorry to learn the news that Queen Elizabeth was recently bitten by one of her own pet corgis after she tried to stop a savage fight among the Royal dogs. I sincerely wish Queen's early and easy recovery.

Meanwhile, I would like to mention here my experience about the English dogs. Dog is the most favourite pet among the English people. One would

hardly find an English family which rears no dog. To them, these pets are innocent, and harmless. But I could never agree to their view. During my stay in England, most of the evening I used to visit a park nearby our residence with my compatriot. The dogs visiting the same park with their masters wouldn't allow us to stroll or sit carelessly. They would either chase us or try to touch our clothes or hands

or would bark. We were rather allergic to these pets but their masters, some of them our friends too, would always plead that dogs were harmless and innocent; they only wished to do fun with us.

So far so good. But the fun became a regular routine. Then we thought to carry some stick with us to scare or punish those naughty dogs. Of course it was very difficult to cane them as the English laws are too strict: However, we never had to punish them because later on they became friendly to us.

But now, biting the Queen, the English dog has proved a fact (one we tried to establish) that it is not that much innocent and

harmless as it was thought to be!

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### Bangladesh Festival

Sir, The latest Bangladesh Festival at Hotel Sheraton, Dhaka, co-sponsored by BPC, is one more success story of Parjatan mainly in terms of long range benefits rather than instant profits owing to its innovative and renovated programmes. Without such diligent endeavours, a nation's cultural heritage cannot be effectively exposed and popularized among other nations.

Projection of characteristic socio-cultural and natural features coupled with adventure plus recreational resources has been the integral component of tourism industry ever since adoption of modern marketing mechanism.

Bangladesh has no choice but to resort to such popularizing manoeuvres as often as possible both at domestic and at international levels. Also, tourism in Bangladesh should be intensified and diversified simultaneously. Sightseeing, boating, trekking, amusements, and the like among additional feasible projects may be considered as a part of Parjatan's expansion plans for near future. To feed the needs for the target, domestic as

well as imported necessities that are profitable, may be utilized as efficiently as possible, for 'More Features At Low Cost' may bring prosperity to Bangladeshi Tourism.

Furthermore, in addition to periodic participation in the multinational exhibitions, BPC may find frequent festivals at different urban centres at home and abroad more fruitful as regards potential native and foreign consumers of Parjatan's resorts. Emphasis on specialized programmes — research to recreation — for select tourists will definitely magnify Parjatan's image.

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