Dhaka, Monday, November 25, 1991

What then Is this Parliament for?

It is more than nine years that the autocratic regime of Lt Gen Ershad introduced the upazilas. The full ramification of its effects has yet to be grasped for this genre of political action is necessary for slow and long acting - acting on the economy and sociology and not politics of the society. But no one had an iota of doubt that mean political expediency and not the best interest of the nation was behind the action. The Ershad action which had no mandate from people, the ordinance establishing the new administrative unit with that grotesque hybrid of a name, did not get a particularly nasty press. Even then there were some that suspected in print that the step was being taken not to decentralise power but to universalise corruption. Taking crime to the doorstep and the grassroots and bringing the whole nation - down to the Ershadian magic figure 68,000 villages — to its knees before the one omnipotent — that was the idea, thought many.

Very few people, excepting, of course, the benefiting touts and goons, ever fell in love with the new thing that over the past near-decade has been graduating into a kind of a system — not eminently good to be sure but also not far worse than many things that pass in Bangladesh. We count ouerselves as one among those that, knowing its genesis quite well, had been keeping a wary watch over the development of the thing - not opposing it directly for two reasons : one, we were not well up with the deep as well as extensive social implications of the slow-acting thing and, two, that more things were involved in the matter than mere good and bad of the action and those first of all included political chicanery. It needed political insight, honesty and courage to call all the bluffs that the 1982 ordinance epitomised. And it is a fact that we had been capitally waiting in that department over many many years.

If we haven't been head over heels in love with the Erashadian innovation, we want it to be categorically recorded that we do not either like the way the upazila has been thrown out of the window, lock, stock and barrel.

The mode of Saturday's abolition of the upazila etc has all trappings, appearances and appurtenances of just another political expediency even if originating from a world of goodwill for the nation. There will be quite a few who will see in this action the removal of non-BNP upazila chiefs and the parishads from power and placing the administration of the units in the hands of MPs who are mostly BNP men. It will be pretty difficult to find fault with such a mean suspicion.

The suspicion should have been avoided in the interest of the consolidation of our march towards democracy. And could have been done very easily indeed. Place the thing before the Parliament and let there be a debate involving the whole nation. And let Parliament take the decision, advisably perhaps, on a sure and certain fading out of the UZ system and its repleacement taking shape and roots slowly but surely.

This hasn't been done. What then is there a

Parliament for?

Good Luck Mr Ghali

The United Nations has a new leader. With 11 votes in the Security Council, Butros Butros Ghali, the Deputy Prime Minister of Egypt, was selected to be the next Secretary General. His appointment will be finalised after the General Assembly votes its consent of the choice. As an Arab Christian (Coptic), from the continent of Africa. with a Jewish wife Mr Ghali seems to be tailor made for the post. Through his person, the Secretary General must represent the world. The more diverse and varied is one's personal background the easier it becomes for that person to see the different points of view ← at least that is what conventional wisdom says.

Mr Ghali is a veteran of the international politics. Egypt has been preparing him for a high UN post for quite sometime, and with that end in view elevated him from the deputy foreign minister to the position of deputy prime minister, a few years back. In 1987 he was proposed for the Director Generalship of UNESCO to replace Mr Amadou Mahtar M'Bow. Later he had to withdraw under African pressure. As the deputy foreign minister Mr Ghali played a pivotal role in President Anwar Sadat's historic trip to Israel and has subsequently been a leading player in the post Camp David Egypt-Israel relations. Following the Gulf war and the emergence of the US as the unquestioned arbiter of the Middle East crisis. Mr Ghali's role in regional politics acquired further importance. As a trusted exponent of the US point of view, and as some one who came from Africa — this being Africa's turn for the post and as one who had somewhat of a general acceptability, Mr Ghali was almost the only choice.

The problem with Mr Ghali is his age. At 69, many people suspect he may not have what it takes to perform the job of the Secretary General. The reason that Mr Ghali's age has become a subject of speculation is because the world appears to be set for a much more active UN than it has ever been before. The end of the Cold War, which was the single most important reason for the ineffectiveness of the UN in many instances, and with a broad agreement between President Bush and President Gorbachev about the world body becoming the centrepiece of the "new world order," the role of the UN is definitely going to be more important than before. To lead this new and more dynamic UN, many of the world leaders, including the US, wanted a younger and more vigorous person. Well, Mr Ghali may surprise his critics and show that behind those many years lies a mind as sharp as the UN ever had and a will more determined than people are giving him credit for at the moment. We sincerely hope that is the case.

We wish the new Secretary General all the success in his tough new assignment.

unquesti-onable faith that Government has no business to be a businessman. To promote economic upsurge in the short-term, what Government must do is to decide firmly

what it must not do. The gut feeling prevailing in the business community at present is that the economy is not picking up. The very favourable political outcome after 20 years of independence has yet to be complimented by an upswing of the national economy which, frankly speaking, still remains in the doldrums.

Government is fully committed to private sector development. A liberal decontrolled economy is today the accepted ideal. Yet there has been no appreciable increase in business activities. Direct private investments seem to be holding back. The leading players who must act in the economic drama seem to be waiting behind the wings for quite a while now. The whole act is being played out in a rather dull and stertle manner. It is necessary to engineer the desired dynamism within the shortest possible period of perhaps the next 100 days at most by which time, the major decisions should be arrived at and policies to be pursued firmed up for a vigorous drive to generate growth and devel-

The first question that would arise is related to money. Where is the money? It does not grow in a tree. But no, it does since thousands of crores of takas are stashed away in the bank accounts and the secret vaults within the banks — inspite of the collapse of BCCI. Further, these montes are located both inside and, more important, outside the country. There is another source — during the current financial year (1991-92) remittance of income from the middle-east might even exceed 100 crore United States dollars. Thus the savings and remittance from within and

Economic Upsurge in the Short-term: What Government Must Do

without are not too small or tnadequate to make a solid be ginning for vigorous growth and development. What to required is to design the policy and programme package that simultaneously satisfy two con ditions: (i) maximise returns to those who are the depositors of savings in the banks and carners of income abroad; and (ii) direct these funds to private business development and productive investment. As a result, growth would inevitably follow and create jobs for the

Elements of Policy

There are several elements of such a policy and programme package. Let any Bangladeshi be allowed to open a foreign exchange account within the country where funds are all coming from abroad. Such money both in short and long-term deposits should carn returns, tax free, equal to what it would have carned elsewhere. In case of taka deposits in the scheduled banks within the country, no question would be asked by tax authorities if such funds constitute equity investment in an

Over 90 per cent of the workers' remittances ultimatchy reach the rural households and such incomes are concentrated primarily in the districts of Chittagong division. The Grameen Bank could handle the remittance banking business, offer attractive returns and use the deposits according to its existing loan programmes so that funds are utilised for highly productive purposes and for those who could not reap the benefits from the oil bonanza of the

An important part of any investment project is cost of civil construction which has skyrocketed in Bangladesh during the last ten years. It

must be brought down through import of billets so that cost of production of construction steel is equal to the cost and freight included value of imported steel. Same should be true of cement. As regards brick, its present price is utterly scandalous. Using our very own natural gas for burning of bricks made of indigenous clay, why the material should be so expensive? The cost of brick and steel should not be more than half of what it is today. Further, by adopting modern large-scale construction techniques, for example pre-fabricated building components, cost of civil construcof sector corporations, for example textile and jute industries, there are profitable units which should be sold first. It is obvious that no private businessman is stupid enough to commit his own moncy for any loss-ridden factory. However, it is amazing to find that ofken the government officials talk in terms of disinvesting the unprofitable enterprises. This is dumbo logic - plain and sim-

Foreign Exchange Account

Holding foreign exchange account would immediately boost government's exchange

From LDC to NIC by Shahed Latif

tion could be considerably lowered. In the short-run, the spur to construction would create millions of new jobs. It would lower the investment costs of the new manufacturing enterprises in the private sec-

Initiate widespread privatisation: There are no reasons why government should own hotels, run buses, launches, distribute petroleum products or natural gas, fish in the Bay of Bengal or remain engaged in shipping and ferry boat crossings. These are easy areas and in many instances divisible; as for example buses and trucks of Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation or ships belonging to the Bangladesh Shipping Corporation or Trawlers of Fisheries Development Corporation and similar other enterprises (Inland Water Transport Corporation, Dredgers Organi zation of Water Development Board) could be individually sold out to private parties lead ing not only to the privatisa tion of public assets but total liquidation or obliteration of the state enterprises. In case

reserves which means enhanced capacity to borrow investment funds from abroad. Freeing investment funds of tax obligations is bound to boost investment of black money and in the process enable the change of colour from black to white. This is justified on the ground that carnings retained for invest ment are usually granted tax exemption. Moreover, investment directly adds to GDP, create jobs — it constitutes the vital process of economic growth. To mc, the colour of the money is therefore of hardly any concern. Its contribution to the growth of the economy is significantly more important.

The idea of Grameen Bank's involvement with remittance income would be the best recourse to the use of such funds. The construction sector should be the major source of employment generation during the ensuing construction season with the onset of the dry months, the period falling within the scope of the next hundred days. The privatisa-

tion of the easily disinvestible state enterprises would be the source of additional public rev enue, at least a part of which could be invested in the proposed factory development company in order to develop factory sites and construct eheap prefabricated factory buildings together with all the utilities, access roads and telecommunication facilities.

The intended entrepreneurs would then only have to open the letter of credit and bring the machinerics, install them which therefore, could be operational within a period of 4 to 6 months. People with carnings abroad and foreign investors should be particularly attracted to the availability of readymade factory buildings. Thus inspite of the lack of long term foreign exchange loans at the moment for the private sector, carnings of Bangladeshis from abroad being allowed to be deposited in new foreign exchange accounts could be very productively diverted to assist in the mushrooming of small and medium scale industries in the new premises set up by the Factory Development Company. The Government would thereby enjoy the opportunity to witness the physi cal manifestation of growth primarily in the cities of Dhuka, Clittingong, Khulna and may be elsewhere as well.

Vigorous Privatisation

Privatisation pursued in a firm and vigorous manner would be the hallmark of the 100-day programme. This should be the best means to restore business confidence. In order to further support the liberal market forces, all subsidies to public enterprises must stand withdrawn with immediate effect. Let the lossridden enterprises stand on their own feet by cutting down costs. Every company, anywhere in the world, does it,

remain indifferent to all that

was going on." In the course of

her crusade, she endured

death threats, vicious smear

campaigns and, ultimately.

in the 1990 elections, she and

fellow candidates from the

NLD, Burma's biggest opposi-

tion party, won an overwhelm-

ing majority, soundly defeating

the government-backed Na-

Kyi's popularity, has refused to

transfer power to a civilian

government, arresting NLD

leaders and emasculating the

however. Suu Kyi has become a

symbol of hope and undisputed

leader of the democracy

movement which analysts say

will be considerably strength-

ened by her winning the Nobel

Peace Prize. "She managed to

infuse a new way of thinking

among the population at large,"

old when her father died in

1947, shot by a political rival

on the eve of Burma's inde-

pendence from Britain. But her

life has always been influenced

by his work and ideas. "I draw

inspiration from my father,"

she said once. "I read a lot of

his speeches and writings.

They are timeless and contain

interest, however. After study-

Politics was not her primary

much political wisdom."

OPINION

Suu Kyi was only two years

said Lintner.

To the Burmese people,

tional Unity Party.

Although forbidden to run

detention.

they know that the state exchequer would bail them out eventually. Hence all subsidies to cover up losses must be withdrawn; and bank credits made available only after the enterprises have been able to cut down their costs to the bare minimum. If not feasible, let these mills and factories be closed down. Still there would be net again to the economy since it is simply ridiculous to manufacture jute goods at Taka 53,000 per ton against the market price of only Taka 25,000 per ton.

but not in Bangladesh since

Privatisation is usually referred to in case of disinvestment of public enterprises but it is a much broader concept. Privatisation is marketisation. Any enterprise which cannot withstand the test of the market, that is, fail to at least breakeven in the totally unrestricted, free and competitive place of exchange for goods and services must face liquidation. Only those who are efficient can flourish in the market and this is the fundamental strength of the capitalist system and that is why socialist economies with overwhelming public controls have failed all over the world.

It is disheartening to note that the essence of progressive liberalisation to promote a vibrant market economy is hardly appreciated by the bureaucrats of the government who are more concerned by the loss of public, that is their own control over the commanding heights of the economy. The basic issue is that in a progressive market economy. government has no business to be a businessman or an industrialist. Government should be involved with only those activities where private sector is not forthcoming like health, education or road building. But even in these areas, privatisation is feasible under certain conditions and I will revert to this subject in later weeks. For the present, the 100-day programme must very meaningfully establish that government has no business to be a busi-

ing in Rangoon and India.

where her mother served as

ambassador. Suu Kyi went to

Britain's Oxford University,

earning a B. A. in philosophy in

1967. For the next four year,

she worked at the United Na-

tions secretariat in New York,

where she met and married

Michael Aris, a British scholar

where Aris took a job as pri-

vate tutor to the royal family of

head of the translation de-

partment. Suu Kyi herself be-

came a researcher in Bhutan's

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The

couple returned to Britain in

1975 when Aris accepted a

teaching post of Oxford Uni-

versity. Aris continues to live

there with their two sons

since Suu Kyi returned to

Suu Kyi's marriage to a Bri-

Frustrated by Suu Kyi's

growing popularity despite her

isolation, the Rangoon regime

has tried several times to un-

dermine her influence. Last

year, a law was passed forbid-

ding Burmese married to for-

eigner from running for politi-

freedom if she agrees to leave

the country and live the rest of

her life abroad, but she re-

It also offered Suu Kyi her

tish citizen and her life in

England has been a target of

attacks by her political oppo-

Burma in 1988.

cal office.

The couple went to Bhutan

of Tibetan studies in 1972.

The military, afraid of Suu the Himalayan kingdom and

Aung San Suu Kyi — Symbol of Hope

Will the Nobel Peace Prize Help Liberate the Burmese?

T is possible Aung San Suu Kyi. Burma's popular opposition leader, has not yet found out she has won the Nobel Peace Prize for

1991. The 45-year-old leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD) has been held incommunicado and under house arrest in Rangoon ever since her party won a landslide victory in elections last year. She is accused of inciting unrest and of being a

threat to national security. Most Burmese in Burma who heard of the award from foreign radio stations on October 14 were jubilant, but could not show it. Burmese living in exile in Thailand and other

countries celebrated openly. The award, welcomed by many as the best means of focusing the world's attention on the human rights situation in Burma, has been a powerful vindication for Suu Kyi's coura-

geousness. "The Rangoon government is going to be furious, the people will be happy but there won't be dancing in the streets," said Burma expert Bertil Lintner, author of Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma's Unfinished Renaissance.

Rather, the impact is going to be felt internationally when Burma comes up for discussion at the United Nations General Assembly next month. A resolution tabled by Sweden last year which condemned human rights violations in Burma and called on the Rangoon regime to honour the outcome of the 1990 elections will be on the agenda.

It was opposed by Cuba.

China, Mexico and Singapore and at Japan's request, was postponed for this year.

"It will be difficult for the United Nations and the world to ignore the plight of Burma now that Suu Kyi has won the Nobel Prize," said Lintner. "indirectly, all this will have an impact on Burma."

The charismatic leader of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) was placed under house arrest on July 19, 1989, the day after she canceled plans to lead a protest walk of thousands of her followers to commemorate Martyr's Day.

Three years ago, Suu Kyi left her home in Britain to visit her ailing mother in Burma. never knowing that in four months her life would undergo the most drastic changes. The daughter of the national hero. Gen Aung San, who led the Burmese fight for independence from Britain following the Second World War, Suu Kyi had no premonition of the fateful role she was to play in her country's future.

Along with Burma's 40 million people, she was swept along in the revolutionary tide that began in June 1988 with street protests and ended violently three months later with the killing by the military of thousands of demonstrating students.

Since 1972, Burma had been ruled by Gen Ne Win. who imposed his 'Burmese Road To Socialism' ideology and effectively kept the country backward and isolated from the rest of the world.

Supporting the students' cause, Suu Kyi, a scholar and

Winning the Nobel Peace Prize for 1991 could help Burma's imprisoned opposition leader to free her country from dictatorship. Yuli Ismartono of IPS reports from Bangkok.



mother of two sons, went from village to village, urging people to speak out against Ne Win. In her first campaign speech in August 1988, outside the fa-

mous Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon, Suu Kyi said: "The present crisis is the concern of the entire nation. I could not, as my father's daughter,

Take it Easy Ingrazi!

confess, without being apologetic, that I have placed my son in an English medium school - because he was brought up out of the country for ten years since he learnt to walk. There is a special subject called "Easy Bengali" for such students, to pick up the mother tongue quickly.

Abroad (somewhere in SE Asia), he was in a 'real' English medium school - meaning, the teaching staff were 'imported' from GB/UK/ England (which usage is correct?). I use the word 'imported' as it is a very popular word in that part of the world - the influence of affluence. The charming sales girls in the shops would pointedly use the word when showing some merchandise. After sometime, I got so over-saturated with the 'imported' syndrome that one day I blandly told one shop assistant "Look, am also imported! Do you have something locally made?"

Here my son appears to have developed some inferiority complex, as his class mates make fun of him when he speaks 'English English', on which he had been brought up (he is fluent in spoken Bengali). Later he tried the local diction, but the response was almost nil. Now he happily speaks in Bengali throughout with his colleagues. He tells me that the teachers teach and explain both in English and Bengali, and the conversation with the teachers were mostly in Bengali. There are no classes for spoken English (actually practising to speak correctly in English). This is not a complaint, but this appears to be the prevailing situation.

The standard of English practised could be gauged from the following example, taken from the Class VII Question Paper on "English Language' set for the final term examination:

"General Observation: You are reminded of the need for good English and orderly presentation. All section [sic] are compulsary and such numbers of questions are to be attempted as indicated. Marks

allocated to each section are also indicated. It is difficult to write and

teach simple English. I am hoping my son would pass. — Chuckles.

Kathal Bagan Lane

Sir, For some time now walking down Kathal Bagan Lane has become precarious, for both sides of the street have been taken over by unauthorised traders and hawkers of sorts, all selling their wares with apparent impugnity. The 'genuine' shopkeepers, 'too, extend their premises by encroaching on to the street in complete disregard for passers by. This infringement of the right of the way has deprived the innocent pedestrians of the passage meant for them. For anyone unfortunate enough to reside in any of the several by-lanes within this area, movement is always accompanied by personal risk of injury.

Police on duty in the area or at their nearby posts seem either incapable of keeping control or turn a blind eye to such illegal activities and appeals to end this undesirable situation fall on deaf cars.

In the interest of the inhabitants of this area the authorities are requested to take a scrious view of the situation as well as necessary steps to restore discipline and tranquillity of this primarily residential area, one of the most crowded in the whole of Dhaka city.

The present situation is so bad that a rickshaw finds it impossible to navigate its way past the makeshift shops and accumulation of waste is a around constant threat to public health. In the interest of the local inhabitants who are forced to live in this unholy mess, the authorities are urged to do something positive to mitigate the suffering.

Khalilur Rahman Kathal Bagan, Dhaka.

Moral Development and UN

Sir, Inspite of spectacular development in science and technology, and awe-inspiring discoveries in the redress of human miseries, the whole world is facing a problem which is at once so gigantic and so imperceptible that the human civilisation seems to be inexorably running headlong into a crisis the parallel of which has not been seen any time before in history. I am speaking of moral degradation among peoples of all countries

- developed, developing, underdeveloped alike. The glare of material prosperity has apparently kept dangers of moral degradation away from public view; but the poison has gone so deep into all strata of human relationships that there is a real apprehension of a sudden global explosion of the cumulative effects of degradation engulfing the whole human race. The situation may not be manageable by a single individual or a single country now. It needs universal attention and that immediately.

Realising the dangers, Dr. Abu Obaidul Huque of Institute for Advancement of Science and Technology Teaching (IASTT), Dhaka has proposed that United Nations Organisation should come forward to shoulder the responsibility of moral rearmament on a worldwide scale. We wholeheartedly support this proposal and should hope that the UN should create a specialised agency for moral rearmament and devise ways and means to arrest the rapid deterioration in the moral fabric of the society, particularly the the younger generation, before it is too late. This agency should be

entrusted with the task of educating the people about the ill effects of moral degradation. The sensible people all over the world should take this danger seriously and put in all out effort to halt this journey to collective suicide of the human race due to lack of morality awareness.

A. F. M. Abdur Rahman Professor, Dhaka University.

AIDS

Sir, AIDS is spreading fast the world over. We feel that Bangladesh should intensify precautionary measures against this killer disease. More AIDS detection medical units should be set up in the country and publicity covering various aspects of AIDS through mass media be enhanced. A special intelligence team may be formed to keep vigilance whether any suspected AIDS patient is entering or living in the country.

M. Zahidul Hague Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka-1207.