Dhaka, Tuesday, January 15, 1991.

Crisis in Lithuania

President Mikhail Gorbachev is caught in a "no win" situation in Lithuania which many, inside and outside the Soviet Union, would think is, atleast partly, his own creation. This Baltic state, one of the three which were grabbed by Joseph Stalin before the Second World War and whose annexation by Moscow has never been accepted by the United States, has been agitating first for self-government and then for total freedom since early last year. Finally, the state parliament made a proclamation of independence in March, a move which was eventually followed by a series of abortive talks between the Baltic leadership and Kremlin.

Looking back, one cannot say that the whole international community jumped at the prospect of secession of Lituania -- and for that matter, of all three Baltic states -- from the Soviet Union. True, most people were -- and, indeed, still are -- in favour of Lithuania exercising its right of selfdetermination. However, there was international concern, especially in Washington, that this was no time to present Mr Gorbachev with a new crisis. when he was already faced with a growing internal opposition, outburst of nationalist sentiments in several other republics and economic hardship, caused by shortages in major Soviet cities.

If the crisis last year was triggered off by the Lithuanian state government, Kremlin did not help matters by taking a tough line when it imposed a severe economic embargo against the "rebel" state. However, underneath this seemingly tough measure, President Gorbachev still appeared to be maintaining a moderate position, rejecting the call from hardliners for the use of force.

The current crisis appears to stem from a change in the position of Mr Gorbachev. For all practical purposes, the Soviet leader has abandoned the facade of moderation and taken up arms, as it were, against Lithuania.

Soviet troops stormed key buildings in Lithuania, causing injuries to several people, while Mr Gorbachev warned the separatist republic to "bow" to Moscow's authority.

The reaction to the use of force by Moscow against the Baltic state has provoked understandable reaction from European powers and the United States. They have called upon Mr Gorbachev to desist from further use of force and return to the negotiating table to work out the constitutional future of Lithuania. Some Western nations have also threatened to cut off the promised financial assistance to Moscow if Kremlin did not send its troops back to barracks. It is only the Pope John Paul II who has urged Lithuania "to be patient" in pressing its demand for independence.

It is indeed this advice from the Vatican that probably provides one way out of the crisis. However, patience from Lithuania alone will not help. Kremlin too must make appropriate gesture to encourage the Baltic state to move towards some kind of accommodation with the Soviet leadership. For both sides, too much is at stake. With the Soviet Union facing a winter of discontent, a winter of food shortages and economic hardship, it is hardly the time for Kremlin even to think of a military adventure against one of its republics. Again, any further deterioration--political or economic--inside the Soviet Union will not help any republic, not even Lithuania, however much it might like to break away with Moscow.

Films from Japan

We welcome the Japanese Film Festival now being held in the city. We do so, not only because it will provide our film lovers a chance to see the works of Japanese film giants, such as Kurosawa. Ozu Yasujiro and others, but also because it will give us a chance to know a Japan which is a bit different from a country known for its Toyotas, Sonys and the like. Given the quality of the films being shown at the festival, it will give our audience a glimpse of the cultural, artistic and aesthetic Japan that captured the imagination of the world much earlier than her economic might captured its markets. It is our hope that this festival will deepen our understanding of the Japanese people.

It is the need for our people to broaden their understanding of peoples of the region -- both SAARC and beyond -- that underscores our suggestion that we should encourage the holding of similar film festivals with all our neighbouring countries and; going beyond, do the same with Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. In many ways, the cultures of these countries are close to that of ours and there are many areas where we could learn from them.

While congratulating the Bangladesh Film Archive for organising the festival, may we request the organisation to look into the possibility of doing the same with the countries that we suggested. In this regard help could be sought from our embassies abroad and of the embassies of the concerned

countries based in Bangladesh.

OUOTES

My gut says he (Saddam Hussein) will get out from there (Kuwait)

_George Bush

Every Muslim will be a missile to be thrown against the enemy...

—Abdullah Fadil Iraqi Religious Affairs Minister

There should not be any rancour in politics because once you feel that way, you are finished.

> - V.P.Singh Former Indian Premier

efore the News every night, with the camera trained on the National Monument at Savar. Bangladesh: Peace or Truce? Bangladesh Television plays a lovely, haunting song in mem-

ory of those who gave their

1971. It begins "throw open all

the windows wide". Ilas this

latest populist uprising prised

open the casements in an

overheated, overemotional

nally seized supreme power.

His going is a shouting out of

twenty years is no more than

Bangladesh's most distin-

guished playwright. He had full

faith, he said, in the young,

especially in those born around

or after 1971. Certainly the

young men and women who

came round after dark, disre-

garding the curfew, with

leaslets and papers of the

struggle had faces bright and

that some magic must be

working somewhere because

the upsurge which has just

brought about the change was

not at all centrally directed.

People calambered on to the

rallies and demonstrations on

their own, undeterred by

lathis, teargas or bullets from

the police, the Bangladesh

Rifles or the Army. In the iso-

The army barracks just out-

A side Kabul is the last place

one expects to see pacifism

encouraged. Yet, right in the

middle of the barracks stands

a huge mural depicting an

Afghan woman holding her in-

jured daughter against a back-

had enough of war", it is an-

other sign of a sophisticated

campaign by the government

to win the hearts and minds of

city of Peshawar this sophisti-

cation is lacking among the

leaders of the mujahedin who

have been discussing a plan to

launch a full-scale attack on

tack by a mujahedin force of

nearly 100,000 men. This

would be preceded by a pro-

longed rocket barrage aimed at

the capital's military bases. In

practice, this means that

rockets would indiscriminately

rain down on the city's two

a fifth column in the form of a

military coup or a popular

uprising against the regime in

favour of the advancing muja-

sign of the deep divisions and

resentments among the muja-

hedin leadership that some of

them believe the plan has been

drawn up by the Pakistan

brainchild of Golbuddin Hek-

matyar, the hardline leader of

the Hizbi Islami. Hekmatyar

has made it clear that the he is

determined to go ahead with

the plan, with or without the

backing of other mujahedin

Kabul, the more moderate

leaders of the mujahedin are

opposed to the plan. They ar-

gue that it has to wait until the

spring when the milder

ian population of Kabul to take

refuge outside the city.

weather would allow the civil-

Luckily for the people of

In reality, the plan is the

It is perhaps yet another

The plan would also rely on

million inhabitants.

hedin forces.

leaders.

The plan envisages an at-

Kabul.

But in the Pakistani border

the war-weary population.

With the message of "We've

ground of rocket explosions.

The remarkable thing is

"In the life of a nation

"Now it's quits".

an eyeblink".

determin**e**d.

for the Liberation of

country which is desperately lation of homeinternment, unsure and despondent at the with only the BBC, VOA and same time? Probably not, be-Radio Australia as the sources cause a rock-hard weight of of what was happening, the cynicism and fatalism seems to fall of the Ershad regime weight down most politically seemed a fluke because the conscious Bangladeshis, parexperienced never imagined ticularly those older. They have that, with the clout of the locked into their memories, Army behind him, he would complete with chapter and crumble so quickly and utverse, every detail of terly; he must have sensed a Bangladesh's slide down a tidal wave of hatred and debloody, slippery road, tramtermination. So perhaps there pling and mangling her is something in Syed Shamsul Constitution the while . Not Huq's (my playwright friend) the least example was the way belief in the young. in which General Ershad fi-The other romantic notion

of people centres on elections, if they would be "free and fair". This amounts to almost an obsession and the Indian experience of government being shooed out by voters is mentioned all the time without, I am afraid, realising how mercenary, violent and castedirected Indian elections can be today. For Bangladesh's parties and their leaders the election of the ruling junta and elections have been the driving ideology with policies taking a back seat. An economist friend recently ran a high-level seminar on policies, inviting all the political parties to send representatives to spell out their parties" views. Ershad's Jatiya Party and the BNP refused; the Awami League spokesperson spouted vague and portentous generalities. Whenever prodded about what her policies would be Sheikh Hasina's invariable reply has been, "First

let's get in, let them leave". What, then are the hard, knobbly things like, the Economy, Education and possible Communal Turbulence?

An Indian View

by Chanchal Sarkar

STAR Guest Columnist

With the unstoppable rise in the prices of essentials, the siphoning off the benefits and perquisites of foreign aid and the consequent stagflation the economy is in very poor shape with its soft underbeily totally exposed to aid-giving powers like Japan, Britain and the United States. It was put about in foreign broadcasts during the upsurge that these powers had made strong diplomatic representations to General Ershad about restioring civil and democratic rights and about opening talks with the Opposition in pain of choking off aid. Other diplomatic sources in Dhaka, however, decalared these reports as cooked up and imaginary because, according to them, these countries needed Bangladesh as a client state even more than Bangladesh necded them.

With constant closures, with examination schedules blown skyhigh and the universities turned into mined battlefield, Education in Bangladesh is in shambles. Those who can afford it are anxious to send their children abroad. There are frequent enquiries about India but the preferred educational haven for the wealthy Bangladeshi is the West just as the desired

centre for medical attention is Bangkok, no longer India, But education or medical attention abroad can be only for a very

Bangladesh can be reasonably satisfied about its communal relationships. From Sheikh Mujecb's time Hindus and Muslims have lived without the riots that used to mar the country earlier. This communal tolerance is very noticeable in the educated and upper classes and is said to prevail also in the rural areas. Communalism for economic ends is, however, thrustful and the pressure is still on in the villages. Until now the famous Hindu temples and areas in Chittagong and Dhaka (like Kaibalyadham Dhakeshwari) had never been violated. This time, it is alleged, it was a provocation choreographed by General Ershad's Government as a diversion with two of his ministers taking the organisational role. General Ershad then dramatically rushed in to offer relief and solace. After the incidents a good number of families, those who could afford the shift, have left Bangladesh and llindus today sleep uneasily with their eyes and ears cocked towards Ayodhya.

Communalism could be said to be one face of a search for a national identity, some other signs being the contending of the slogans "Joy Bangla" and "Bangladesh Zindabad",

and the delving into Bengali history in a search for uniqueness. I had been told of a report on Bangladesh's culture by a government Commission published last year and then, apparently, withdrawn. I was told that it spelt out and outlook have with religious emphasis and harped on differences from India with almost Pakistani dogmatism. With all that was going on around I couldn't read the report from cover to cover but I did right through it as thoroughly as I could. To may pleasant surprise I , at least, found no such theocratic massage. Instead, there was much appreciation of the contribution of the Hindu and Buddhist strands to Bengal's life and culture including the mention of many distinguished non-Mulsim scholars, writers, poets and cultural figures. Of course there was emphasis on the message and importance of Islam. Of course, too, there was criticism of exclusiveness. arrogance and feudal overlordship--meaning the Hindus in undivided Bengal. The recommendations, to me, seemed liberal. On enquiry I learnt that

Bangladesh presents not as hefty a presence in India as India does in Bangladesh. But India seems far less inter-

if the report had been with-

drawn it was probably because

people in the world of culture

were not disposed to listen to

official recommendations.

ested and concerned than she should be. For her Bangladesh is 'just another country'. That is a great mistake. Active in their country's interest, official Indian knowledge about the giong on in Bangladesh is acute and alert but diplomacy in a troubled neighbouring land with a very considerab reservoir of goodwill must come forward a few steps more. Sadly it is not just India and its Establishment. even West Bengal and its intelligentsia seem a trifle bored by Bangladesh. One there is a realisation in both those quarters that, with the trends visible in India today. there is no ground for rany preaching.

Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed has a hard row to hoe and the next three months and after in Bangladesh will not be easy The elections may not settle things as there are too many inequalities, corruptive influ ences and ambitions on the boil. On Wednesday morning. way before sunrise, I made my way to Dhaka airport hoping the planes would fly. As dawn borke, every one in the departure hall crowded round the radio in the general shop, listening to the BBC. The News over, excited discussions broke out. I heard the shop owner, Amjad Hussain Montu, a nice young man in his thirties, say wistfully to all and to himself, "Is this peace? Will it last?" In their minds everyone in Bangladesh is asking those two selfsame questions.

A noted free lance Journalist and author of many books. Sarkar will be writing for The Dally Star as a guest columnist. He wrote the above piece which is published here by arrangement with the Hindustan Times after his visit to Dhaka during the historic week last month.

Kabul Talks Democracy, But the Mujahedin Fight On

by Kasra Naji

The government of President Najibullah is waging a campaign to broaden its support. The ruling party has renamed itself, included non-party members in the government and is talking about multi-party elections. The Mujahedin are indifferent to these changes and are talking about their next offensive.

In the first meeting of all the different factions of the mujahedin for more than a year, the moderates also opposed the plan because they could not agree on who would

take over in the event of the

fall of the Kabul government. The episode bears all the hallmarks of an extle mentality, for the mujahedin leaders seem detached from the mood in Kabul. The plan ignores what the government in Kabul

Afghanistan USSR Mazar-i-Sharif Pakistan 100mls 200km India Turkey Pakistan **North Africa** Saudi Arabia

has been doing- not without some success - to change its image and policies so as to breaden its support.

Says Farid Mazdak, the young and up-and-coming Vice-President of the ruling Watan (Homeland) Party: "I say categorically that we cannot govern Afghanistan alone. We need the co-operation of our brothers in Peshawar."

Taking its cue from the developments in Eastern Europe, the party changed its name from the People's Democratic Party and shunned its Marxist past in July. It changed its programme and laid new emphasts on Islam as the guiding

"The party struggles for the consolidation of the system of democracy based on a multiparty system," said the new programme of the party. Soon afterwards non-party

politicians were brought into the government, including the widely-respected Fazlehaq Khaleqyar who became Prime Minister.

The Press, though still government-controlled, has been showing more courage in setting the agenda for debate in the country.

Although many of the changes remain largely cosmetic, there is no mistaking the direction the party has chosen under the chairmanship of President Najibullah.

Few opportunities for emphasising the need for national reconciliation are missed.

The liberal opposition, with its close links to the former Alghan King, Zahir Shah, is tolerated and active in Kabul The National Salvation Association, led by Professor Mohamed Asghar, is busy testing the limits of the new glasnost

in Kabul. Government officials encourage rumours of secret contacts with the mujahedin leaders with the aim of bringing them round to the government plan for transition to democratic elections.

Direct negotiations with the mujahedin leaders are the centre-piece of the government plan for a negotiated settlement. Predictably, the plan has been rejected out of hand by the mujahedin.

At the same time, the army, which is still heavily supplied by the Soviet Union and pampered by the government, has had some successes in driving back mujahedin forces from around the capital. The government has also been reaping propaganda from the mujahedin rocket attacks against the capital's residential areas.

The changes the government has been introducing are broadly in line with the preva lent international atmosphere of the post-Cold War era. While continuing to back the two

Sufia Chowdhury

Eskaton Garden,

Dhaka

Let us examine

ourselves

Sir, Why do we not have any

political cartoonists? When we

arc serious, why are we so se-

rious? What has happened to

our sense of humour? It stops

working when we need it

most! We loss our wits at crit-

Our brand of seriousness has

not led us anywhere worth

mentioning. We have become

We are experts in passing on

the buck even though the buck

does not have much of a

market value. Nobody wants to

face this stance : "Tell me what

you can do, not what others

We are chary of pointing out

the goodness in others; and

fervently seek the negative

We have high hopes at the

I feel the leadership of our

country are aware of the su-

per-human task ahead of them.

However, before analysing the

performance of others, kt us

A. Mawaz, Dhaka

examine our-selves first.

after math of the elections.

ainly in order.

ical moments.

are doing

side of a situation.

unpicasant company.

sides of the war, the two superpowers have been searching for a political solution to the problem, and are now reported to be close to an agreement to cut off arms supplies to both sides.

What has prevented an agreement so far is the differences over the precise role of Dr. Najibullah during a transitional period in the run-up to elections.

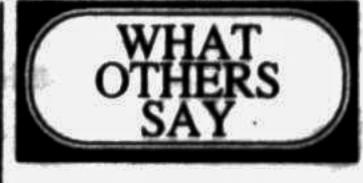
While the US negotiators have been demanding his resignation, the Soviets have been pointing to the Nicaraguan example whereby President Daniel Ortaga presided over free and internationally supervised elections and then lost.

The Kabul government is also benefitting from the Gulf crisis. Kuwaiti financial backing for the mujahedin has now stopped. And according to mujahedin sources in Peshawar, financial aid from Saudi Arabia. which matched the US aid to the mujahedin dollar for dollar, has been reduced in the wake of the cri-

Furthermore, according to one Western diplomat, the US will need Soviet support to maintain an international consensus against Iraq. As a result, the US is unlikely to take a hardline posture supporting the mujahedin in case it should altenate the Soviets from froming a united front over the Gulf crisis.

In Peshawar, the mujahedin leaders seem to be taking no notice of the developments in Kabul or at the international level. Says Professor Sebghatollah Mojadedi. President of the interim government of the mujahedin: "Our jihad is against the communist regime in Kabul and until it has been removed from power we will continue to fight." - GEMINI

Kasra Naji is a producer with the BBC Persian Service who has just returned from visits to both Kabul and Peshaurar.



The Israeli Factor and Others

There is not good war, but sometimes a bad peace can la worse that war itself. A peace that left Saddam Hussein un challenged in Kuwait would be trobly bad. It would mean sacrificing a high principle: No country has the right to overrun and annex another. It would mean abandoning a great interest: secure access to the oil of the Gulf, on which the prosperity of the whole world has come increasingly to depend. And, because of those two things, it would mean accepting a peace that was no peace at all, merely the luil before a bigger explosion.

Iraq will not win the war, but then no one else might. A quick military victory over Baghdad is not guaranteed. Anti-Western terrorism could emanate from a defeated frag. repeating the history of terror

-The Economist London

that followed the Six-Day War, Peace must be given a chance up to the last moment. - Business Times Singapore

to bring back the dignity of a noble profession like

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.

Letters for publication in these columns should be

M 1586

System of Govt

Sir- With electioneering gaining momentum, some have raised a very timely and pertinent question whether we would have Presidential or Parliamentary system of Government next in our country. If the Members of the Parliament decide the issue in Parliament, then before the ensuing election they should clear the policies on that matter so that we the voters are able to choose our representatives in Parliament who subsequently decide the issue for us.

This election should be regarded as referendum on the issue whether we want Parliamentary system or Presidential system of Government in our country to establish real democracy. Munira Khan Dhaka

Dignity of journalism

Sir—The present unfortunate trend of criticizing the personal lives, specially of women, since the fall of the autocratic govt. of H. M. Ershad, in the press speaks of very poor taste in journalism and brings to mind the question of whether we are fit enough yet to be granted press freedom. Many will bear me out when I say that the reporting on the activities of the women supposedly associated with H. M. Ershad, borders on porno literature. All women certainly cannot be condemned for the activity of a

few and that is what the press has succeeded in doing.

Please, let us rise above personal prejudices and try journalism.

> Farida Zaman Uttara Model Town

Whom to condone?

condone what Saddam Hossein has done or is doing. But, at the same time, can we condone what America is doing in the name of peace, in the Middle East, with its usual role of "Big Daddy?"

We cannot help but wonder what the big powers, who seem to be getting hysterical now, were doing, when Panama was invaded and Noriega whisked away by a super power? And can we forget the pre-dawn raid on Granada? And have we forgotten the Falklands and last, but not the least, the burning issue of the Palestines, yet to be resolved?

Or is there a separate code of conduct for superpowers? Would somebody please care to explain? Najma Haider

Kathalbagan Dhaka

Are our soldiers not

being sent to the Gulf. there was a big fuss kicked up by the political parties. We wonder why they are so silent on the issue now? And, as reported by the BBC Bangla Service a couple of days ago, our soldiers have not yet been innoculated against some of the dreaded diseases against which the soldiers of the western countries have been innoculated in case of chemical warfare. Why this discrimination? Or are our soldiers not important enough? Surely, in case of the horrid chemicals being used, everybody is bound to

important enough? Sir- When the troops

Sir-We certainly do not from Bangladesh were be affected?

Few answers are cert-