

## A Vision from AL

In 1971, the Awami League gave the people of Bangladesh a vision that laid the foundation of our new state. Now, two decades later, the party seeks to revive the same vision for a somewhat mundane purpose, to win an election. Will it work?

To be fair to AL, the vision that it is offering the electorate, through the manifesto released yesterday, is not the carbon copy of the 1971-72 programme on which the country's first constitution was based. A great deal is common, but there is much in the manifesto which reflects a grudging willingness to learn from the changing times, if not from the past mistakes.

Part of the revived vision centres on the four state principles: nationalism, democracy, secularism and socialism. At least two of these guiding principles—secularism and socialism—are subjects of considerable controversy, while the third—nationalism—is open to different interpretations, not just within the two major parties but also among the educated elite, the controversy that diverts the attention of the decision-makers from the real issues of food, shelter and education which concern millions of impoverished people of Bangladesh. A poor farmer is likely to wonder which type of nationalism—Bangalee or Bangladeshi—is likely to fill his stomach first.

The reiteration of AL's commitment to socialism raises more complex issues. The party threw its full support behind the concept of socialism in a wholly different national and international context, in which the strong backing given to this country by the socialist bloc of nations, especially the Soviet Union, provided a positive element. The AL President Sheikh Hasina would certainly expect her economic advisers to redefine the Bangladeshi brand of socialism in such a way as to eliminate all similarities between this concept and the system that collapsed all over the eastern Europe in 1989-1990 or, what is more important for this country, and the disastrous nationalisation move in 1972-73. For winning votes, it may not be quite safe for AL—or for BNP—to admit some of its past policy errors, especially on the economic front, but such an exercise would have certainly raised the credibility of the party in the eyes of the educated elite. On another issue, Sheikh Hasina has got a lot of people extremely worried. It relates to her defence yesterday of the Special Powers Act, which she blandly described as 'white', since, as she put it, it has helped the country to keep H.M. Ershad in custody. Indeed, the AL leader who was obviously not thinking of hundreds of political prisoners who have suffered from this act, under different regimes, could not have taken a narrower view of this uniformly unpopular piece of legislation.

Maybe Sheikh Hasina and her party will be able to modify their position on these issues. After all, there is so much in the AL manifesto that offers the promise of a better future for millions of people, especially in rural Bangladesh. The party's grassroots organisation and its long historic ties with the rural electorate are its great assets. It will be a pity if the party overlooks the importance of these assets by getting bogged down in issues which are best left for calmer times when the country's basic needs have been met.

## Parting Thoughts

There is some more time left for the official or calendarical opening of spring. It is not now far behind—literally. This is another way of saying that winter would be gone in a matter of days. This second thought would sadden many a Bengalee with his heart in the right place—or the eyes, or more aptly the palate. For whatever may be the poets have long sung—in this living and ticking Bengal of yore and eternity winter has always been the best time of the year. What with its mellow sunshine and misty weaving of mystery into nature opening on to gold-quilted mustard fields, what with the first blossoming of the roses and the air redolent of heady Shephali fragrance,—and what with the many—indeed unending—good things that only the palate prizes. Do not we have the confirmation of the winter being everyone's yearly halcyon days in the proverb 'Karo Poush maash, karo sharbonash' where disaster is counterposed to the wonderful time that Poush—the first of the two winter months—represents? And there shouldn't be any doubt that it is a proverb of the Bengalees who celebrate the golden season at Nabanna—there being nothing of the kind for the rest of the year.

We used to take plenty of pride in having six seasons, each of them distinctly come to its own in its own good time. Very individualistic indeed. Now with the air and water being polluted and the light losing its purity as the malaise of slumming down every little nook of nature takes hold of the whole of our land as also our being, our awareness of the six have been reduced to three: a scorching summer, a cold winter and the wet rains. There is no place for things in between—fine and delicate. And it is being said half in jest and half in wistful sorrow that the seasons have found a last sanctuary in the songs of Tagore. You tune your radio or light up your TV and the old man's melodies welcome you to autumn or spring—the difference between which had hardly occurred to you—ever. And about this darling of maybe 200 million souls in the eastern alluvial retreat of the subcontinent,—even Tagore failed to be fair. There are so few songs on winter. And in those few, winter is all denudation—as bare as the bearing of a *sannyasi*. One whose intimations send shivers down the spine of the *Amlak* trees!

While in a week's time we shall be starting on our yearly wait for winter of *palaparon*—the festivals that is, and *pithapulis* or sweets and cakes—to return, shall we not tell ourselves the kind of philistines we have been for ages—in falling to take in all that makes spring the king of seasons. The *Palash* and *Kanchan* and *Shimul* and *Parjat*—and most of all Tagore himself with his generous offerings of spring melodies in *Bahar* and *Paraz*—are sure to make good and more the parting of our season of bounty and good living.

# Nepal Faces Election Hurdle to Democracy

by Gopal Sharma and Binod Bhattarai

DEMOCRACY may have returned to this Himalayan kingdom, but governing will not be easy for those who come to power when the country's first multi-party elections in 30 years are held in April.

It is not so much the politics of governance that will be troublesome.

The economics of managing the country will create the problems.

The army saved King Birendra last April when about 100,000 protesters demanding the end of his direct rule stormed the palace. The King imposed a curfew for two days and finally agreed to restore the multi-party system absent from Nepal for 30 years.

Under the new constitution, the 46-year-old King, who has ruled since 1972 as a near absolute monarch, transferred sovereignty to the people and guaranteed fundamental rights. In the process, he whittled down his own role to that of a constitutional monarch, not unlike Britain's Queen Elizabeth.

Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, who is 66, said: "This means there shall never again be one man rule in the country. It is a point enough for all of us to rejoice."

Before conceding, the King sent his troops on a rampage, killing 45 demonstrators. Finally he said he was proclaiming the new constitution "in the belief that the constitution will help to forge the people in bond of unity and advance the cause of multi-party democracy in constitutional monarchy."

The King asked Bhattarai, head of the Nepali Congress party of social democrats, to form an interim coalition government with the United Left Front of the communists who jointly led year's democracy movement.

Even after elections, any purposeful functioning of the democracy will depend on government success in handling the King, the army and the power centres around the palace.

Nepal dabbled with western-style parliamentary government in 1959. The Nepali Congress party was voted into power; King Mahendra, Birendra's father, throttled the fledgling democracy the following year, saying that the monarchy was undermined.

Political parties were banned, leaders put

Free elections are scheduled for Nepal this April, following on the popular movement last year that re-established multi-party democracy. The transition to a constitutional monarchy will be a stiff challenge for Nepal, with a worsening economy, alarming population growth and rising expectations.

behind bars and the King ruled directly for the next 30 years.

Landlocked between India and China in the Himalayas, Nepal is among the world's poorest countries. Per capita GNP is \$160. Population growth has surpassed all development efforts



KING BIRENDRA Role whittled down

and forests are fast being depleted.

A study by experts at the eight-nation International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) said: "The main achievement of the panchayat-style (old regime) development was the establishment of addictive dependence of foreign aid."

Said Mahesha Banskota, an ICIMOD economist: "There is trouble everywhere. Take population. All projections show there is going to be a tremendous pressure on the per unit of arable land available."

The population of 18 million is growing by 2.6 percent a year and is expected to reach 29 million by 2010.

Pitamber Sharma, a regional demographer, suggests incentives be given to couples to keep families small and encourages the legislation of abortion. Use of contraceptives in a highly traditional society is low. People accept children as given by God and need to be coaxed to accept birth control. The average Nepali family has six children.

A 1983 World Bank study estimated that the saving to Nepal for every birth averted was \$50, making the value of reducing population growth by one million to about \$50 million.

On average, Nepali girls marry at 15 while the present legal age for marriage is 16. The report suggests pushing the marriage age to 20-22 years.

The predominantly agricultural economy is another problem. From a net exporter of food grains a decade ago, the country has now become a net importer. Per capita availability of food is also declining.

Some 45 percent of Nepalis are small-scale farmers who cultivate marginal land or work as labourers. They live below the poverty line or on the brink of poverty. Strong feudal forces in Nepal have opposed land reforms initiated in 1957.

Himalayan rivers with hydro-power potential exceeding that of the United States and Mexico put together could make Nepal rich. Only suspicion of doing business with India and a lack of investment funds have precluded implementation of major river projects.

Water is Nepal's major asset and a strong card to play against India, which has an acute shortage for power and irrigation. New Delhi has to be convinced that Nepal is not only its neighbour but a friend who holds the key to some of India's perennial problems. That could push the long-shelved giant hydro plants ahead.

The Nepalese hope the restoration of democracy will attract foreign investment and that constitutional guarantees of human rights will lead to increased Western aid.

For the April elections there will be two main parties—the Nepali Congress, which follows a mixed economy platform, and the United Communist Party of Nepal, a Marxist-Leninist party.

Ganesh Man Singh, the Nepali Congress leader, is confident of victory: "Hands down we can get an absolute majority. But that is not enough. We have to win a two-third majority." Man Mohan Adhikary, chairman of the United Communist Party of Nepal, dismisses Singh's claim as a dream.

The focus of Nepalese politics will shift back to the King if no party wins an absolute majority or if the single largest party fails to get the support of smaller groups.—GEMINI NEWS

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WINDFALL oil earnings, a rush of new investments but high inflation and a decline in the stock market highlights Indonesia's economic picture for 1990.

Plans for new deregulation will give a starting shot for the economy in 1991.

After the Aug. 2 Iraqi seizure of Kuwait, world oil prices swelled. The impact on Indonesia, member of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), is a boost to oil revenues by as much as US\$ 500 million for every dollar increase in the price of crude.

Indonesia yields 1.3 million barrels of oil per day (mbpd) and exports 60-65 percent of production. Output increases to 1.4 mbpd are expected in December to cater to winter consumers.

For the current 1990-1991 fiscal year which started April 1, the government set a price of US\$ 16.50 per barrel for Minas crude as a measure of account for oil-based earnings for the state budget.

In the upshot of the Gulf crisis, the Minas benchmark price was reset upward to US\$ 28.30 per barrel in September when Brent, a benchmark crude, reached US\$ 33.

Mr Ginandjar Kartasasmita, the minister of mines and energy, says the increase in oil-derived income is "encouraging." He warned, however, that Indonesia can also stand to lose by the oil price rise.

Oil-dependent industries will charge more for their manufactures and Indonesia will have to pay more for what it imports. Also, if countries are hit by inflation and recession, they will buy less of

## Investment Highs Plus Gulf Crisis, Spur Indon Growth

by Warief Djajanto

Indonesian goods at a time when Indonesia is boosting its non-oil exports, he says.

Mr Ginandjar says a "safe" oil price would be between US\$ 21 and US\$ 25 per barrel. Meanwhile, new investments have advanced markedly over the past year.

Sanyoto Sastrorodoyo, chairman of the Board of Investments (BKPM), says total

rised from US\$ 848 million in 1986 to US\$ 1.5 billion in 1987. It jumped to US\$ 4.4 billion in 1988 and again to US\$ 4.7 billion in 1989. For the first eight months of 1990, US\$ 6.8 billion has been approved.

The strain on back-up facilities is telling. Indonesia presently has only 1.4 million telephone lines. The govern-

finance for industrial expansion is the stock market. The number of listed firms in the Jakarta Stock Exchange rose from 58 in January 1990 to 118 by October. Capitalisation surged from 4.99 trillion rupiah (US\$2.7 billion) to 11.01 trillion rupiah (US\$ 6 billion) in the same period.

The aggregate figures may indicate a rise in market activ-

Inflation reflects an economy growing faster than capacity. Deregulation may be the order of the new year.

approved foreign investment in 1990 will reach US\$ 8 billion, twice that of 1989.

The remarkable rise in new investment, however, is worrying planners who have to consider new infrastructure to accommodate the incoming investment.

Domestic investment has also risen sharply, from 19.6 trillion rupiah (US\$10.5 billion) in 1989, to a mind-boggling 42.6 trillion rupiah (US\$ 23 billion) in the first eight months of 1990.

The climb in total private investment partly stems from the government's deregulation policy since 1988. Another factor is the appreciation of the yen which induced Japanese plants to relocate to Southeast Asia.

New foreign investment has

ment plans to add another 1.5 million lines in three years. It is inviting the private sector to invest in telecommunication, as well as in road and harbour development.

Since the launching of the deregulation measures, BKPM has been aggressive promoting Indonesia abroad. Its overseas missions apparently were too successful.

On deregulation, the government says the process will continue. Finance Minister J B Sumarlin says before the start of the next fiscal year in April 1, 1991, the government will put forward a bill on insurance and pension funds. The draft law, when enacted, will be able to tap new major sources of finance development, Mr. Sumarlin says.

A currently active source of

ity. But the Jakarta Stock Exchange plummeted in the latter half of 1990. In April, its composite shares index peaked at 638.8. This has gradually declined to 398 by October 18.

There are several reasons. One is the sheer growth in the number of listed firms. This has given investors a wider range of choices and companies have to hustle to attract them.

Second is the spillover effect of international stock markets on a downturn.

A third reason has shaken shareholder confidence. On September 4, the governor of Bank Indonesia, the Central Bank, disclosed that Bank Duta, a major private bank and listed on the Jakarta Stock Exchange, incurred major losses in foreign exchange dealings.

It was later revealed at an extraordinary shareholders meeting that the losses amounted to US\$ 419.6 million. The revelation has put a damper on listed-company credibility.

That situation is compounded by the perceived lack of professionalism within market-support instructions— for example, brokers and custodian banks—like the prompt settlement of shares transactions.

A fourth cause is competition from the money market. Deregulation has also brought about a proliferation of 35 new banks, bringing the national total to 146 commercial banks. In the year up to March 1990,

The Banks are hard put in finding money and have gone to the public offering as much as 22 percent interest on time deposits.

The difficulty in getting funds is partly due to government moves to curb lending in a bid to cut back inflation, 8.11 percent by September.

This high rate stems from an economy growing faster than the capacity to manage that growth, says Radious Prawiro, minister coordinator for economic, financial and industrial affairs.

The major cause of the inflation is a rise in demand (for goods and services) linked to the rise in investment and financial and banking activities since the execution of the deregulation measures, he explains.

Too high an inflation rate will endanger Indonesia's export programme, he says.

Given this, with a 7 per cent growth rate overheating the economy, an inflation-arresting type of deregulation may be the order of the new year.—*Depitnews Asia*.

## WHAT OTHERS SAY

### Flight to Bankruptcy

Bankruptcy has become a familiar destination of US carriers, and now it is Pan Am's turn. Time was when this kind of announcement would chill passenger traffic, but today several airlines continue to operate as they scratch for survival by distancing themselves with Chapter 11 from the claims of creditors. Now almost cashless, Pan Am is the 'third of the nine largest United States carriers to seek this protection in the past two years. Continental, fifth largest, filed last month, and Eastern did it in March 1989. Both are still flying, sort of, and Pan Am expects to continue in some pared version.

Founded 63 years ago by an army captain to haul mail between Key West and Havana, Pan Am merged, grew and prospered in the days of tight regulation. With a near monopoly on international air travel and solid contacts in Congress, the airline pioneered routes around the globe and became America's flagship carrier. As it was supposed to, deregulation of the industry in 1978 brought competition. Some competitors acquired newer aircraft; Pan Am continued to fly its older gas guzzlers. In the 1980s, Pan Am began selling off assets to cover deficits.

Chapter 11 protection became essential if Pan Am was to avoid liquidation.

—*The Washington Post*.

## 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.

### Energy sources

Sir, On my return from a tour, I was happy to see my articles on energy issues in Bangladesh in your esteemed daily, followed by your excellent editorial stressing the need for an energy policy for the country. I would like to mention that Government has been thinking of it for some time and, in fact, I had the privilege of acting as Convenor of a Group set up by the Government to prepare a 'draft energy policy' more than two years ago. The fate of it is not yet known.

In this connection, I would like to commend you for the stress that has been given by you for intensive research required for the optimum utilization of our natural fuel resources. As for example, we should take maximum advantage of our peat deposits and fully exploit the recent discovery of coal in Barapukuria and Khalishpur, in addition

to the deeper mines in Jamalganj. Studies could be undertaken for their underground gasification, liquefaction and perhaps transporting pulverised coal by pipeline. Researches are now in progress to prevent possible pollution of the environment by unwanted gases and dust particles coming out of a coal-mine or coal-fired transport, resulting in acid rain and ultimate Greenhouse effect, which could be disastrous for Bangladesh.

I am tempted to plead for nuclear power due to my past association and commitment. I shall, however, write separately on the subject, this time as a neutral energy enthusiast.

Anwar Hossain, Dhaka.

### Election fever

Sir, It is after a long time, that once again the country is experiencing an election fever.

The days preceding the elections is a time for canvassing by various political parties and candidates. This is done in a number of ways, by putting up banners, posters, etc. This time we notice more of big arches being built by different parties.

They are colourful and decorating the city thoroughfares in a very uncommon way as if we are heading for a festivity. This method of 'beautifying', is particularly liked by many.

We fervently hope that the results of the elections will be as refreshing, and bring in an era of democratic freedom, prosperity and well being for our country and people.

Zillur Rahman, Bogra.

### The UN and Iraq

Sir, The United Nations Organisation which came into being after the Second World War with a solemn pledge of starting a new era of peace and tranquillity for the future generations now casts shadows in the minds of the peace loving people of the world over for the double standards maintained by some of its big members. Since the inception of the UNO, the USA

manipulated many major issues, detrimental to its interest, with veto power. In fact, it appears that the USA wants to be police of the world and dictate others for its selfish ends without caring for the world opinion.

The invasion of Kuwait is definitely an act of aggression. But the Bush administration left no stone unturned to punish Iraq and also implicitly for achievement of its goal of controlling the oil rich Arab nations and safeguarding expansionist designs of the Zionists. It has been able to seal the mouths of some of the big powers taking advantage of the prevailing circumstances in their respective countries—by making concessions to many which they would not provide normally. Even a few heads of Muslim state have fallen in the trap and siding with the USA much against the will of their people.

The USA advocates that they will free Kuwait and reinstate the ruler of Kuwait, by any means. But why such a headache for the USA? Are they really sincere in their intentions? If so, why they did not take a step to push

Israel out of the occupied territories? Rather they vetoed UN Resolutions against Israel and have been arming it with sophisticated weapons to commit crimes against the Arabs.

Never in the history of the UNO, we have seen such quick decisions as have been taken in case of Iraq. Even if such a military action would have been necessary to enforce the UN resolution, the forces against Iraq should have been composed of all the member states to be called UN Force.

J.U. Siddiqui, Chittagong.

### Performance of Biman

Sir, Biman Bangladesh Airlines is the flag carrier of our country. People of various countries travel by it. Therefore it's service should be such that we as citizens of this country be proud of it.

Unfortunately, often when on board we notice the services provided are not really up to our expectations. This is mainly noticed in the case of taking care of passengers.

It would be highly appreciated if the air hostesses as well as the male stewards had been more professional about their jobs, and not give an impression that they are doing a favour to anyone.

A smiling face is always much encouraging than a serious or a grim one.

Taher Rahim, Sunamganj, Sylhet.

### Madrasha education

Sir, Madrasha education in this country is being neglected by the policy-makers. In my opinion, the government should give equal attention to the improvement and development of the existing Madrasha education as it does in case of the general education. More science subjects and English language teaching should be incorporated in the curriculum of Madrasha education. Adequate funds must be made available for the smooth running of the Madrashes.

M. Zahidul Haque, Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural College, Dhaka.