

The Challenge from Yeltsin

In some ways, we are lucky to be far away from the Russian Republic that we do not have to follow the complex — some would say the weird — politics of the leader of the largest state of Soviet Union, Boris N. Yeltsin. Over the years, Mr. Yeltsin who has been an ally of the Soviet President Michael S. Gorbachev in their shared reformist zeal has been steadily moving away from his friend, criticising the Soviet President on the slowness of his reforms, on arming himself on a wide range of sweeping executive powers and finally on building up his image abroad than in tackling domestic shortages.

On Tuesday, Mr. Yeltsin delivered yet another attack on the Soviet leader, asked for his resignation and transfer of his power to the collective body, the Federation Council in which Mr. Yeltsin would undoubtedly be a dominating figure.

The latest reports from Moscow suggest that this is the first time Mr. Yeltsin has outright demanded the resignation of President Gorbachev and that there is no hint that the Soviet leader will be a member of the Federation of Council.

The situation is complex, and so is position held by the maverick, leader of the Russian Republic. There is no doubt that Mr. Yeltsin wants to pace up the reforms so that millions of Soviet people may not face the severest winter since the World War II. The question is, can Mr. Yeltsin achieve his laudable objective by removing Mr. Gorbachev and replacing him by what may well turn out a squabbling Council? Again, in such a situation, can the leader of the Russian Republic prevent the emergence of a dictator from within the armed forces? Could Boris Yeltsin be such a leader?

A great leader by any standard, Mikhail Gorbachev is of course not blameless. Maybe he has been too hasty in acquiring too much power for his office as the President of the Soviet Union. Again, it is possible that the Soviet leader paid more attention to ending the cold war with the United States than on bringing bread and sausages to the empty table of the Russian peasant.

Herein lies the contrast between the Russian experiment and the Chinese reforms. In Beijing, the emphasis right through the whole decade of the eighties has been changing the rural scene, bringing better seeds and fertiliser to the farmer, even providing him with loans to buy tractor and telephone. The farmer thus experienced affluence he has ever known during the past four decades. The Russian experiment went the other way round. It filled the Soviet mind with new ideas and hopes — all very essential in changing the society — but left the stomach empty. What is needed is for both Messrs Gorbachev and Yeltsin to work together, shoulder to shoulder, to tackle the challenge facing this great country, the Soviet Union.

Sexist Terms

Some time ago, there was an uproar when some women journalists protested against the use of the term *newsmen* in the columns of the International Herald Tribune. The Paris-based daily quickly succumbed. Now, instead of newsmen, we have journalists or, count your blessings, reporters. However, once we are obliged to do away with what some people call sexist terms, one can draw up a pretty long list. For instance, according to a table just prepared to the National Union of Journalists of Britain, we do not have businessman (instead we have business manager, executive, boss, business chief etc.), we do not have cameraman, but photographer or camera operator. No, we do not have manhood, but adulthood; no man-in-the-street but average citizen; and, believe or not, no woman doctor but just doctor. Finally, for our Bangladesh Foreign Office, we should no longer use spokesman but just official or representative.

One can of course change all these terms and do away with sexist language. But can we change our attitude?

A staff journal of a UN body reported some years ago that when a male executive was out of his office, he was attending an important staff meeting, but if a woman was not available, she was in a washroom. A male executive may be out on a mission; the woman is on a sick leave. A man may have taken a day off to see an art exhibition; a woman is spending the afternoon at a beauty parlour.

You cannot win them all.

Latif Nusayyif Jasim

— Latif Nusayyif Jasim
Iraqi Information Minister.

Our assessment of them is that they are on the verge of collapse.

— Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf.
Commander of the US forces in the Gulf

Election '91: Tasks of the Day-after

by Moazzem Hossain

The electoral storm will be over and the dust will hopefully settle after the parliamentary polls on February 27. Whichever party or combination of parties wins the majority and whosoever else forms the opposition, there will certainly be a change of policy covering a wide spectrum of national life. Everyone participating in the elections has pledged to establish democracy with public accountability. That is exactly for what the people fought for years but were deluded time and again.

Hopefully, history will not repeat itself, and standard rules of democracy will be followed to give the system of representative government a firm institutional shape. True, the form of government will be an important factor for this. One can only hope at this stage that any disagreement over the system will not distort its outcome.

Holding of 'free and fair' elections and smooth transfer of power by the interim administration to the elected government under a yet-to-be agreed arrangement among the major political parties will mark the beginning of democratic rule after long many years. Precisely how many years after is an issue of extensive political debate. Rival parties or alliances in the current electoral battle look at this issue from their own points of convenience. This is perhaps a non-issue for the average citizen who wants to see democracy and public accountability taking firm roots now, with unfailing commitments by the political parties to practice the same. They would like to see Bangladesh stepping into the future with bold efforts to help overcome its chronic problems of rampant poverty, mass unemployment, severe malnutrition, widespread illiteracy and inter-related causes of backwardness. The dawn of the twenty-first century and a new millennium is now less than a decade away. Many countries around the globe in-

cluding those in Asia have made phenomenal progress in last two or three decades but we still remain in the same old labyrinth.

Are we not a nation capable of changing the conditions of our subsistence-level living, with fruits of sustained development more equitably distributed? Or are we destined to suffer and reconcile ourselves in perpetuity to the third or fourth bottom-line position in the world economic atlas? It is for the future democratic government to answer. But the answer will determine the course of events for the coming years — the turn of the century and perhaps beyond that too. The durability of democratic system will also largely depend on

cases were unique and determined by the bilateral relationship prevailing at a particular point of time between the dispenser of power and patronage and its recipient. In such circumstances it becomes more easy to understand how the Bangladesh economy stagnated in the 1980s and became structurally atrophied. It is no less surprising that rate of investment should decline, the rate of savings degenerate into one of the lowest in the Third World, that revenue collections should remain at an unchanged level over a decade, that the share of current expenditures should in the last half of the

planned or hardline socialist economies is also a stronger reason for a new soul-searching in redirecting our development strategy.

Development aid is no longer an 'open-ended relief kitchen'. Claims, irrespective of our own performances, can no further be made to 'unrelieved generosity' from the donors. Delinquency in use of resources can no longer be sustained. The country will have to look increasingly within itself to build an 'agenda for sustainable development'. Development aid has already become an uncongenial arena where competition

must be sought. Strong public intervention will be needed for social sectors such as education, health and family planning, human resources development and poverty alleviation. The cost benefit analysis of development projects, in the public sector will have to be made on a rigorous basis and investment leakages must be plugged. Detailed and elaborate government controls and regulations which are a fertile breeding ground for corruption should be dismantled. While promotion support and facilities will be necessary for industrial development, the policy focus will have to be placed not on patronisation of rent seekers, commission agents and fortune hunters but on rewarding risk-

growth of manufacturing and the drive for industrialisation and economic modernisation. The primacy of agriculture in the development strategy is another area where the democratic government will have to review the existing policies and reorientate them to sustain a higher growth performance along more equitable lines.

For the most immediate period, priorities for government expenditure will have to be determined on a sound economic rationale, keeping in view the socio-political goals of a sustainable development under democracy. High growth of unproductive expenditures and also inefficient uses of public resources in past several years have been one major cause for lower allocations of available resources for productive sectors. Financial sector is also another critical area where effective and more forward-looking reforms or measures will be needed to improve credit recovery performance and ensure cycling or recycling of funds to more efficient ways.

The new government after the elections will have to address itself to some pending routine works related to overall economic management. These include preparatory exercises for the national budget for 1991-92, assessment of external aid requirements for donors' pledges at the Paris-based annual aid club meeting, revision of Annual Development Programme for 1990-91 and finalisation of the new medium term development plan, and holding negotiations with the donor community or development partners on some policy conditionalities issues concerning on-going aid programmes. The electoral commitments or pledges made by the political parties or particularly those who win the peoples' mandate will be translated into actions through these exercises.

The author is the Economic Editor of The Daily Star

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how the political leadership comes to grips with pressing economic issues. How the elected government handles its development agenda will indeed be the central factor in determining the outcome of the return to democratic politics in Bangladesh.

Formulating such an agenda presents a formidable task because of an unfavourable development inheritance, if not anything else. The point has rightly been elucidated by Prof. Rehman Sobhan, Planning Adviser to the interim government, in his observations at the recent biennial conference of Bangladesh Economic Association.

"A decade of autocracy has left us an unequally personalized development process where all power and patronage was increasingly centralised and development administration was left without any guiding norms. Allocative decisions tended to be arbitrary and no historical memory accumulated to provide a set of precedents needed to sustain disappeared administration. All

1980s come to exceed that of development expenditure and that foreign aid should come to underwrite wholly the entire development budget."

Now at the turn of a hopefully democratic chapter in our history, the immediate backdrop of a debilitating economic situation thus provides yet more a compelling reason to face the challenges with boldness, determination and transparency. Certainly Bangladesh is a country where there is no alternative to optimism. For the nation that gained its freedom at a high cost for a better life, it is impossible, without hope, to go through the deprivations that face the poor teeming millions whose votes are being solicited in the elections. The changing international context in which market economic forces and private enterprise (not of course crony capital as the private sector in Bangladesh is largely identified, rightly or wrongly) are receiving greater attention for economic reforms in erstwhile centrally

among many claimants including those of East European countries is getting tough for external resource transfers. Remittance flows from the Middle East that provided the easy money mostly for consumption purposes are also becoming more and more uncertain now because of the recent developments in the Gulf.

For the elected government, the most daunting task will therefore be to set its priorities for a sustainable economic agenda in the light of the new economic realities after two decades of independence. It is an intriguing challenge at the same time. A sustainable development strategy will call for strict measures to avoid any laxity that only induces the lapse into high spending and low saving. Efforts for mobilisation of resources through an efficient fiscal and monetary system must be stepped up. A variety of unconventional ways based on tapping the underutilized human and material resources

taking entrepreneurship, creativity, skills and hardwork in a more congenial environment that encourages and sustains more and more investments in productive sectors.

For sustainable development, poverty alleviation efforts will of course merit priority attention. The persistence of poverty in Bangladesh or its worsening over the years has been a development antithesis, because successive governments have solicited foreign aid in the name of the poor. The country received about \$20 billion development dollars in last two decades. The outstanding external debt is now over 10 billion dollars, over half of the total size of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Yet then, the poverty syndrome continues in an unabated manner.

Eradication of poverty is an imperative need to help expand the domestic markets by raising effective demand (demand backed by purchasing power) for sustaining the

An experiment in openness that could produce a form of long-dreamt regional unity is taking place in the Caribbean. Leading it is Shridath Ramphal, the Guyanese diplomat who retired last year as Commonwealth Secretary-General.

Ramphal heads a commission of prominent West Indians who are touring the region and talking not to the governments, but to the people. In towns and villages throughout the 13 territories of the Caribbean Community (Caricom) from St Kitts and Dominica to Guyana and Jamaica, they are asking everyone to tell them frankly what they want.

They have urged the people "to respond in great numbers, and share with us your concerns, your fears, your hopes and your aspirations for the future of our community of West Indian peoples."

West Indians have never been shy to speak out and everywhere the Commission has gone—and it is only half way through its task—people are doing just that. They have responded because they say that in 30 years of independence the politicians have never really asked them to open their hearts.

A booklet introducing the commission admits: "Over the period since Caribbean countries achieved political independence, it has become evident that small states, on their own, lack the capacity to develop to the full their natural and human resources."

The last time any public consultation of this kind took place was in 1938 when the British set up a Royal Commission under Lord Moyne following civil disturbances in their then colonies.

The current Commission is quite independent of Caribbean governments, although it has their blessing. The idea for it came from Prime Minister Arthur Robinson of Trinidad and Tobago. He had warned that "the Caribbean could be in danger of becoming a backwater."

The cost is being borne by Sweden, the Netherlands, Canada, Britain and international bodies like the Latin American Development Bank, United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP) and the Caricom secretariat.

The 15 Commission members include Alister McIntyre, Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies and a former UN Under Secretary-General, Professor Rex Nettleford, the Pp Vice-Chancellor, William Demas, former president of the Caribbean Development Bank, and Frank Ramphal, Co-ordinator of the 1990 Caribbean Economic Conference.

The aim of the commission is the highlight a common identity and to move the Caribbean away from the petty bickering and the clinging to every vestige of sovereignty that has plagued the region for so long. The hearings so far have shown that the people are

ahead of most governments.

They want less hassle from officialdom in a variety of ways, such as freer movement between islands. Just to travel from one island to another to do business you must often get passports or permits. People want a common currency—raising questions of monetary union and a central bank that are echoes of the arguments going on in the European Community.

Time and again, people are voicing their disenchantment with government. They are complaining, says Ramphal, that governance is flawed. In some small island states parliament hardly meets—in St Kitts and Nevis (population 43,000) the commission found it had not met for nine

months.

Press freedom is a concern. Although the Caribbean press is freer than in many areas of the world, there are weak spots.

The commission is looking at matters of health care, poverty, the widespread threat of drugs, human rights, women's rights, education, sport and cultural links, as well as relations with the non-English speaking Caribbean, Latin and Central America.

Economic prospects are a priority. The idea of the commission was largely prompted by widespread fears that the Caribbean economy is about to be squeezed by the abolition of the European Community's internal trade barriers on January 1 1993

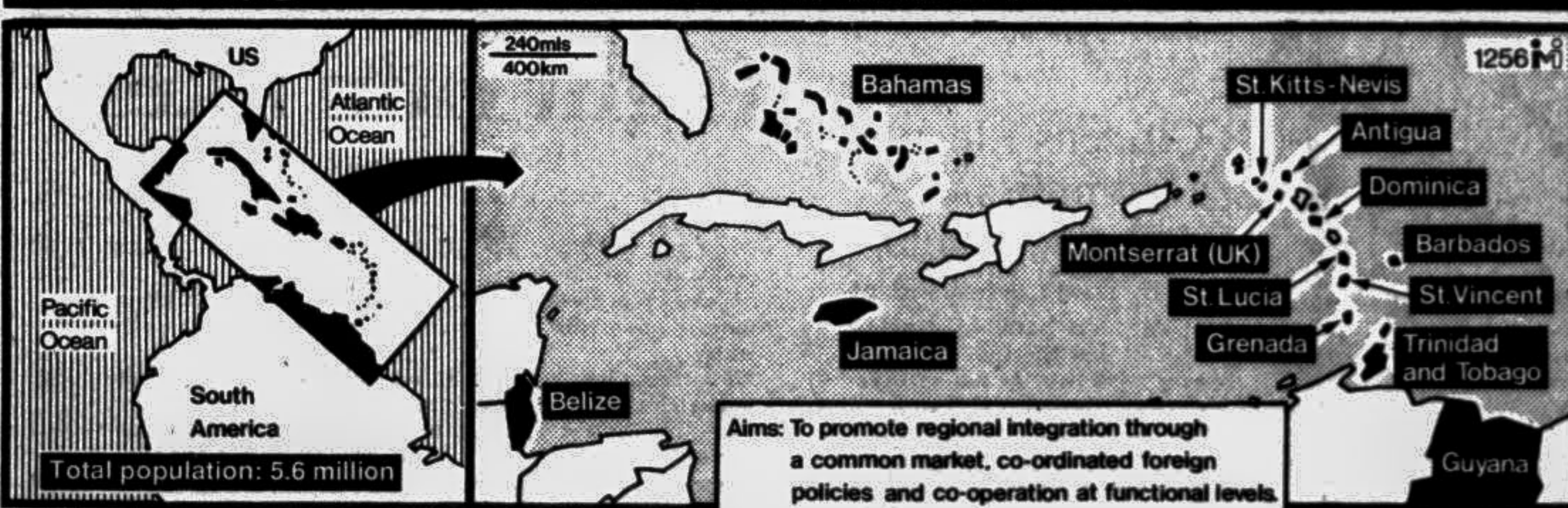
and the free trade area between Canada and the United States and probably Mexico. Unless the Caribbean can get its act together and raise production and exports, its future is bleak.

At the same time people are deeply concerned about retaining their cultural identity. The Caribbean is bombarded by US satellite television. It needs to respond by putting out more Caribbean material and acquiring satellite time for regional programmes. It needs better regional radio and TV machinery to produce the material.

The commission is not confining its hearings to the region. It is also to hold meetings with West Indians abroad. In April it will go to Britain.

The CARICOM countries

Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) was established by Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago (Treaty of Chaguaramas Trinidad) with effect from August 1, 1973. Later joined by Bahamas, Belize, Montserrat, Antigua, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts-Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent.



To the Editor...

Polls campaign

Sir, How devoid our present day politicians are from the realities obtaining in the country will be evident from their current election campaign. Nationalism, secularism or religion, reminiscence of the golden era when they were in power and even which form of government is more democratic and more suitable for the country, are no issues of vital importance to the commonman. But unfortunately the lead-

ers of our main stream political alliances have no other things to offer but to harp on these old tunes like a warped gramophone record days in and days out in their election campaign.

The only issue that is of utmost importance to the common people is that of quick economic development of the country that will bring some comfort to their abject and dismal lives. Our leaders of the major alliances are vague on the subject. To bring about any noticeable

changes in the economy in shortest possible time, a thorough shake-up of the present day system is required which will entail:

- Dealing all corrupt practices with iron-hand.
- Establishment of rule of law and total discipline in our political and social life as well as in all aspects of economic activities covering the industrial, trading, transportation, communication and public utility sectors.
- Totally disciplined labour front and en-

trepreneurs and businessmen fully aware of their obligations and committed and dedicated to the welfare of the society and not the get-rich-quick syndrome that is seen nowadays in our trade, commerce and manufacturing sectors.

Above all, efforts to strengthen the moral fabric of the nation. But knowing well the sources of the campaign and party fund, base of the parties and background of the leaders, it is doubtful

whether our present day leaders have the courage to try to bring about that change.

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Drug addiction

Sir, Drug addiction has become a common malaise of our society. This is especially so, about the younger generation i.e. the teenagers.

Among the various types of drugs, the most easily available and to which the

youngsters get hooked is the 'Heroin'. And availability of it is there in our country, secretly brought in by the drug traffickers.

The only service it is rendering is that it is eating away at the root of our society. Unless very stern measures are taken to eradicate this evil, it will eventually do irreparable damage. Will the authorities please look very seriously into the matter and taken more effective action? Ramen Mojumdar, Mirpur.