

### Vietnam at Crossroads

Hopes that the seventh congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, now in session in Hanoi, would open the way for changes in the country's political system have already suffered a setback. However, there are definite signs that further liberalisation of the economy, with increased incentives provided to the private sector, will continue to gain momentum.

The pattern of the development set by the leadership was outlined on Monday by Nguyen Van Linh, the General Secretary of the party. His speech, dealing with the issues facing the country in a straightforward manner, made it clear that while the leadership would pursue economic changes, including "unlimited" expansion of the private sector, it had no plan to make any shift to multiparty politics.

The course in economic reforms is, in some ways, an established one, set in the last party congress in 1986. Known as *doi moi* or renovation, the package of changes placed the emphasis on the activation of the private sector — here taking a lesson from the performance of individual entrepreneurship in the South — as well as on opening the doors to the West and the neighbouring ASEAN region. This policy, actively supported by Mr Linh, had met with considerable opposition from conservative elements inside the party. It is this opposition which is now held responsible for the decline in the pace of reforms during past two years. To all appearances, the opposition still exists, although its size and influence may not be known until after the end of the congress.

It seems certain that the party leadership, still dominated by a combination of moderate and liberal elements, will continue to push for increased liberalisation of the country's economic life. There is no other choice. After all, there exists plenty of private initiative in the country, waiting to be mobilised and harnessed in industry, agriculture, trade and commerce. If it can play its due role in raising the country's productivity, it can also help in setting up trade channels and promoting tourism, two areas of economic activity which have been earmarked for expansion in coming years.

The question facing Vietnam is whether its policy of economic liberalisation can produce lasting results without changes in the country's political system. It is in this context that the call by the minority in the party for the introduction of the multiparty system, a call rejected by Mr Linh, assumes importance. A case has been made that Vietnam should learn from the changes in Eastern Europe and that political liberalisation provides the only safeguard against a collapse of the existing system. However, the school led by Mr Linh, believes that the masses would not press for political changes provided they are assured of a better economic life. The argument is not without substance, but it cannot remain valid indefinitely. Besides, the Southern part of the country which had been exposed to outside influences, before the end of the Vietnam war, is unlikely to accept the status quo too long.

When and how the Communist Party of Vietnam can move towards a multiparty system still remains uncertain. However, what it should do is to relax its control over the media as well as on the right of dissent. Thus, it should feel its way towards a new political structure. The sooner a start is made in this direction the better. After all, with the 75-year-old Mr Linh insisting on his retirement, the ageing party leadership cannot hand over the charge to a younger group without providing the country with a clear-cut and forward-looking direction in political, economic and social fields.

### Fighting the Drug Menace

Bangladesh's participation in the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking is more than an academic exercise. The sense of urgency felt here and the awareness that is in the process of being created, are direct products of a situation that is delicately poised: the drug menace has already been identified as a problem among the youth in the upper and lower strata of our society, but due to the resistance of the middle class it is still not visible on the high streets of urban Bangladesh. In other words, there is still time to confront and defeat the demon, but any complacency on our part will inevitably bring disaster.

In the '60s Bangladesh became one of the first countries to officially ban cultivation of narcotics. At that time, drug abuse was limited to use of the non-lethal ganja by small sects of followers of various cults. Today, drug abuse has taken on a much wider character, both in terms of the number and type of people who consume and the variety of drugs that are available. Ganja has given way to the highly addictive and lethal heroin, with disastrous consequences for the users and their families. Perhaps most damagingly, a large section of the youth take to drugs in order to impress their friends who regard drug abuse as a manifestation of the high life in the West.

It is clear that society has failed to educate the young about the real character of drugs. We have failed to drive home the message that drugs are dirty and deadly, and many youngsters grow up thinking it is quite smart and glorifying to be part of the drug culture. We have been complacent thinking we were merely the transshipment point for drugs — we were neither the producers nor the consumers. That is how it started in the Pakistani port city of Karachi too, and today one in 10 Karachi resident is a heroine addict.

We must make sure no Karachi is enacted on Bangladesh soil. It is not enough to observe "Days" any longer or give lofty speeches because the time has come for concrete action. That means making the biggest effort in educational and awareness drive among the youth; to cooperate more closely with anti-narcotic forces of other countries to stop Bangladesh from being used as a transit point; to enact strict anti-drug trafficking laws with tough penalties and make sure they are enforced ruthlessly. But we must also make sure not to treat addicts as criminals, because they are really the victims. We should help the addicts return to a normal life rather than drive them further underground by criminalising them. Compassion for the addicts, yes, but no mercy for the traffickers.

LOOKING back at the floodplains of Bangladesh, it seems unbelievable today that within the confines of this land of ours, in fact in and around the capital city of Dhaka was located the world renowned textile manufacturing centre of the world. Muslin, the finest of cloth ever weaved was made in Bangladesh and sold the world over. Little known however is the fact that "Sukha Roti" or dry bread of Dhaka used to be a converted item by the early European sailors since it was the only type of bread not produced with the use of yeast and therefore would not rot for several months in the high seas. Pink pearls of our land was another much sought after item hundreds of years before cultured pearls were ever produced. Till today, Dhaka "malma" is rated as a very fine fabric all over the sub-continent. Till today, the raw material for the best of leather (goat skin) is obtained from Bangladesh.

There is therefore a historic and traditional basis for manufacturing growth in Bangladesh. It is well recognised that textile often is the first industry that flourishes for the rapid promotion of labour intensive manufacturing in a country like Bangladesh. At the same time, there are very strong historic and traditional factors which should compel us to believe that a re-

# History and Tradition for Growth

vival of the textile industry is not only feasible but must be attempted based on all the skills of weavers that still exist in abundance. The key to success remain in the appropriate design and structure of the textile manufacturing growth process. First let us take the million strong weavers who are now working with ancient looms and very traditional designs which have not changed over the last two hundred years. Their products are geared to the domestic market and are relatively more expensive since they manage to sell only by depressing their own returns. Like subsistence farmers, they are subsistence weavers and the marginal productivity of the free family labour tends to be zero.

Modernisation of the handloom weaving sector is a matter of immediate priority where the economy can derive enormous gains in the short to medium term. Through research, development and demonstration small-scale family based textile weaving enterprises should be designed where the profound weaving skills acquired through generations of continuous practice would be combined with a much higher levels of productivity. Second, the traditional designs should

be greatly improved by incorporating very modern ideas and concepts into it. Third, through product differentiation, by means of concentrating on selected varieties of fabrics and textile where competitive edge can be established, a segmented market for Bangladesh textile exports should be established.

Handloom weavers are concentrated in the former districts of Pabna, Tangail and Dhaka which also constitute an adjoining area bisected by the river Jamuna and located

Gem cutting and polishing can also be introduced very profitably since almost the entire value added come from the labour input. Other skilled occupational groups like the potters and blacksmiths constitute the basis for promotion of modern ceramic as well as metal working industries. The traditional pottery industry has already lost heavily due to the influx of cheap aluminium products. By facilitating their conversion from pottery to ceramics through wholesale modernisa-

tion, literally thousands of small scale ceramic industry can be established. The blacksmiths of rural Bengal are the original metal-burgists who learned it by doing. If they are enabled to acquire the modern metal working skills and provided with capital, the small-scale foundries and workshops are bound to flourish. Growing three crops in a year is seriously constrained by lack of agricultural mechanisation which has to be overcome through use of power tillers for land preparation, use of mechanical harvestors and

## From LDC to NIC by Shahed Latif

at the very heart of riverine Bengal of soft silt and the golden jute. The spread out rural textile development would benefit from river transport which is very cheap as well as through easy access to electric power from natural gas available nearby. Above all there are plenty of skilled workers at the door step.

In a similar way cultured pink pearls can be a thriving industry and a big foreign exchange earner. The scope could be further expanded through development and particularly modernisation of the gem and jewellery industry.

threshers, pumps for irrigation and sprayers for agrochemicals. In the next stage we must advance to integrated processing of paddy to obtain not only the maximum amount of rice but also bran oil, feed for the poultry and husk concentrates for fuel which can be used for the manufacture of bricks essential for improved rural housing and other village development projects. All these activities should create the demand for varieties of small scale metal working industries in rural Bengal.

The story of the embroidered quilt is a great legend of the bygone days and a living tradition of today. Its potential in terms of commercial opportunities are immense. A fairly extensive embroidery industry primarily for exports can flourish which has already made a rudimentary beginning but much more needs to be done through research, development and demonstration.

The traditional Bengali sweets; the various snack foods that are made from rice and date-palm sugar (*ptiha*) could be the basis for new types of food industry for export. This is large global enterprises, why not we begin it with our delicacies for bold new initiatives. Do we ever think that the pop-

ular brand softdrinks which are 99 percent water has resulted in the creation of multi-billion dollar trans-national corporations all over the world? There is always room at the marketplace provided we possess the vision and the spirit of innovation. If global vision of new foods appears too far-fetched then we might think of other new types of enterprises where we might have the competitive advantage. Take for example an old well-established industry like printing and publication. Cost of printing of books and international magazines and journals meant for global circulation should be very competitive in Bangladesh. Why not therefore promote aggressively the printing industry? Its employment potential is tremendous and should therefore be exploited to the full.

The Bengal delta has a long history and very old traditions. We are poor today because of over population and this is because of the very fertile soil and the ease of life that used to be there. It was a very rich land of abundant rice and fish. People have therefore come and settled and multiplied manifold. It is in the past glories that we can seek a new beginning for reverting back to the golden Bengal. Sonar Bangla is a myth today but it could be a reality tomorrow.

# German Pupils Show Affinity in Consciousness

As far as interests, future plans, fears, values and the willingness to actively participate politically are concerned, more similarities than differences can be seen among young people in both parts of the reunited Germany. That is the gist of a comparative survey of over 2,000 fifteen to sixteen-year-old pupils from Cologne, Munich, Berlin, Leipzig and Magdeburg, which has been presented in Bonn at the convention for Jugend in Deutschland (Youth in Germany).

Slight divergence in consciousness can be recognized most clearly in the area of politics. A predominant majority of around 95 per cent of the pupils surveyed in both geographical regions shortly before the summer holidays are extremely concerned about fundamental democratic rights, such as freedom of speech and free elections. Whereas the young people from the "East" placed more emphasis on the right to work and equal opportunity in education, their contemporaries in the West considered the freedom of travel and protecting the civil rights of minorities to be of particular importance. Seen as a whole, the democratic practices exercised in the western part of Germany were judged, almost without exception, to be better than those in the former GDR, also by the young people living there.

In comparison to other areas of interest, politics was ranked rather far down of the list; less than five per cent of the pupils questioned in both parts of Germany are involved in youth organizations engaged in politics. Statistically speaking, the young people in the East are on average somewhat more sceptical towards political institutions. Nevertheless, they do not demonstrate any strikingly negative attitude towards politics in general. The view both here and in the East that politics is corrupt is shared by only a minority. Interestingly enough, most young people in both regions — between 60 and 70 per cent — feel more attracted to political groups with a more left-leaning platform, i.e. the peace

movement, environmentalists and opponents of nuclear energy. One could also argue that these groups are associated with an ideal of justice which is linked in a special way to the attitudes young people have toward life. In contrast to contradicting presentations found in the media, radical right wing extremists such as skinheads, so-called "republicans" and "faschos" (neo-fascists) enjoy the sympathy of only a minority of no more than eight per cent of the pupils in the former GDR; the majority expressed explicit disapproval. It is true that 15 per cent of all males questioned in the East and eleven per cent of those surveyed in the west expressed admiration

*Although they were brought up under fundamentally different living conditions, the views of young people from the former GDR mostly concur with the ideas of their contemporaries from the West. In so far as diverging views do arise at all in eastern Germany, they frequently contradict the doctrines of the deposed party dictatorship.*

for Adolf Hitler. But 33 per cent of the male pupils and 50 per cent of the female pupils in the East also "adore" Karl Marx, for whom only 28 per cent of the boys and 26 per cent of the girls in the West were able to show any enthusiasm. The fact that 16 per cent of the pupils from Leipzig and Magdeburg (in Cologne, Munich and Berlin only 6 even per cent on average) would prefer a "Fuhrer" (leader) "with a strong hand", indicates that there is a certain susceptibility to "authority".

In comparison to their western counterparts, the East German pupils are more positive with respect to the reunification. Three quarters of them were in favour of it, but in the West just barely the half. On the other side, only 15 per cent of the pupils from the East opposed the "fusion", whereas in the West every third pupil expressed misgivings about unification with the other Germany. Nevertheless, over half of the pupils from Leipzig and Magdeburg anticipate not only positive but also unpleasant consequences from the reunification. Only a

minority on both sides expect only advantages from the unification, namely one quarter in the East and just one fifth in the West.

Young people in East and West were miles apart on the question of religion. Only 16 per cent of the pupils in the "East" expressed a belief in God, while 56 per cent of the young people in the West answered affirmatively. Only 20 per cent of the youth in the West described themselves as atheist, but in the former GDR the figure was 54 per cent. Accordingly, 86 per cent of the pupils in the eastern part of Germany are not members of a religious denomination, in

the West it is only 16 per cent. Neither the abstract aspect of religion nor the concrete events of the parish exercise any kind of attraction on the pupils in the East. One could almost come to the conclusion that religious credence is more susceptible to influence through ideological propaganda than political point of view. However, 30 per cent of the youth in the former GDR are still undecided when it comes to the question of a Supreme Being. The authors of the study speculate that this may indicate that there is still the potential for religious development in the East.

Without any doubt, political change has affected young people "over there" more acutely, leaving them faced with greater uncertainty. Fourthly, for example, experience great anxiety at the prospect of looming unemployment. Around the same percentage of young people are of the opinion that insufficient measures are being taken to protect the environment in their eastern countryside. The West is judged far more positively in this respect. The im-

age of West Germany is also more favourable in many other areas among pupils from East Germany than the image of the East of the part of their counterparts in the West. Tolerance towards foreigners is lower among these questioned pupils in the East than in the West. More than two-fifths of the youth in the eastern Germany

## OPINION

### The Traffic Scene: Whither Control?

A bunch of 'pun'-chewing, cigarette-puffing traffic constables (six to a dozen, at times) with portfolio-bags dangling from their hands, huddled together say on the North-South Road and Gulistan crossing near the 'Mazar', is an inescapable scene people come by everyday. They are not alone. Two to three smartly, their shiny motor cycles idling by the island grille-fencing of the 'Mazar' and sited on the seats of the bikes none but themselves, keeping a vigil, their beehive eyes not on the labyrinth of stupefying knot of what should have been known as traffic system.

In between such laborious, busy schedule, they will be seen chatting heartily and laughing merrily. The topics of discussion may be regarded rather extraordinary: how one of them bought a big 'rohu' fish with say, only Taka eight hundred despite the cheat fish-seller's initial demand of Tk. fifteen hundred! Another bragging his heavenly haul and bragging-bargain when he could successfully sear the seller of sari.

Meanwhile, bumper to bumper cars, trucks, buses and baby-taxis remain in harmony glued to the ground. Rear-ricshaw's front tire and front-ricshaw's rear iron-rod constantly colliding with such ferocity that the poor passengers on both the rickshaws could barely keep them fastened on to their seats. Just across the point, going towards south of the North-South Road, if you are lucky enough to cross over and scramble through the four-way intersection, one can see lines of double-decker buses idling and occupying almost half the road keeping sufficient space by their left. Now wait! Aren't scores of other private buses of various sizes double parking alongside the double-deckers? Oh! Yes, of course. What's wrong with that anyway? After all how much space thousands of rickshaws, hundreds of sedan cars, trucks, mini-buses, baby-taxis, push-carts, rickshaw vans require! Then, of course, the assortment of sellers proffering all kinds of merchandise from cloth to comb to cucumber to banana (you name it) occupying the whole of footpath. So what's wrong when thousands of human feet unable to keep on the path, take recourse to walking, running, crossing, crisscrossing through the hazy knots of the mainstream of the nightmare?

If the discarded 'dub' or green coconut-shells, that littered the road are impeding the pedestrians and vehicles alike, that is to be borne, for every juggernaut, if it can be coined, has two facades. Pedestrians, under the scorching sun, when their throats get guttery and stomachs turn dehydrated, it is heavenly an opportunity they find to take recourse to the 'dubwala's sitting in long lines on both sides of the road, and have their thirst quenched with God-sent 'dub'-water. Then what to do with the

disapprove of foreigners living in their country. And finally, the equality of women, imposed from above, evidently has yet to sink into the minds of the (male) pupils. Indeed, one can even say that the young people in the former GDR are reactionary in their attitudes towards the role of women and would like to make traditional roles and activities mandatory. Here the propaganda of foreigners living in their country.

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ganda has probably had a boomerang effect. The researchers conclude that these peculiarities in East German attitudes are in almost every case a transitory reaction to the uncertainties of the current situation. When the situation in the East normalizes, they believe, the differences in the minds of the people will probably disappear completely. — Inter Natives

That is very simple to understand: Our traffic sergeant, although took to the wrong side of the road, nonetheless reached that intersection quickly and being extolled by the sense of responsibility, immediately engaged himself to his duty. And, in doing so, he too stretched his hand, that set the opposite north-south traffic also in motion. Thus, the smart sergeant and the agile constable succeeded betiding quite a bewildering situation what was to be traffic control!

None should hurriedly, however, conclude that it was the monopoly of the North-South Road. It is the common enough scenario throughout Dhaka. Take the instance of the road between Curzon Hall and the old High Court. On both the sides of that road there stand cemented wide, raised rickshaw-paths. But who bothers to ride rickshaw on those designated ways? Yes, no one. All the rickshaws can be seen to have usurped the main road between the rickshaw-ways. The Dhaka traffic office has a super sense of service to the society. Certainly you don't miss the beautifully constructed, tastefully decorated and strongly pillared bus-sheds throughout Dhaka. There, inside the bus-shed, you will come across all kinds of goods ranging from pencil to paper to periodicals to varieties of biscuits and chocolates; amra (a kind of citrus fruit) sellers, inevitable peanut sellers and, of course, soft-drink sellers, occupying most of the shed-space. Supposing you were waiting for a bus, you have a wide range of choices to buy and, in this way, you save lot of time and money: you didn't have to go to market — that saved. The only little thing you unfortunately won't get, for which you had been there to begin with: bus. The huddled, gossiping police people do not disturb the routine, and necessarily take a kindly view and prefer to look the other way when buses scuttle and the drivers put their feet on to the creaking, tire-burning brakes and stop the buses, where? Away from the shed right on the middle of the road, loading and unloading the cranky passengers at will!

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Hasn't president Reagan said that a Government (administration) was not always an asset, but could at times be liability and, further, that government should be off the back of the people? If the Dhaka traffic department has taken those words seriously enough from no less a person but the American president himself and, implementing it also, shouldn't we congratulate the department and put a pat on its shoulder. The officers are for a fact off the back of the bus-drivers, rickshaw-pullers, baby-taxi drivers, motor-cyclists, van-pullers that allow them to go-as-they-like and act as-they-wish!

Truck drivers? That is entirely a different matter. They are under the mendacious care of the unweary-sergeants.

### What a disgrace!

Sir, I am appalled to read in your esteemed newspaper the news item regarding the alleged misappropriation of 37 metric tons of wheat by — of all people, chairman of two Upazilas. If such high government officials cannot be entrusted with the distribution of relief goods, who can? No doubt, these two avaricious civil servants will become "instant millionaires" — at the cost of thousands dying of starvation! When will such rampant corruption in this sad country cease to rear its ugly head? When such culprits are brought to justice and corruption seen as a social disgrace! Please highlight such cases in your socially conscious newspaper so there will be some kind of deterrent to committing more corrupt deeds.

"Disgusted" old D.O.H.S. Dhaka.

### Energizing a superpower!

Sir, European Community is willing to "help Soviet economy". USA has also indicated aids for (democratic) USSR. Soviet Russia is implementing her Glasnost and Perestroika that probably have won an invitation to the G-7 summit in London.

Until recently, Soviet Union was prospering as one of the five superpowers and a mighty competitor in all fields — sports to Star War. Soviet superiority in many disciplines including military, ideology, sport, and aerospace established her as a dominant force in the world soon after 2nd World War.

The recent trend of democratic transformation in the COMECON states have virtually replaced Cold War with warm cooperations between the Communist bloc and the free market countries. Nevertheless, isn't it confusing to have learnt that a great state like USSR comprising a rich, vast landmass and an enormous worthy population, operating regular space missions, competing in luxurious events, manufacturing advanced weapons while facing deficiency in essential commodities, and enjoying the Veto privilege at UNO needs help that may confront the "Superpower" status of USSR? M. Rahman Zila School Road Mymensingh 2200.

### Parliament proceedings

Sir, I find the reporting on parliament proceedings sterile and dull. It is a waste of time to read a whole page of the

newspaper only to know about the frivolous comments, insipid repartees and meaningless actions of our MPs. As a result people are losing interest in the parliamentary proceedings. To arouse public interest may I suggest that instead of reporting who said what under the name of individual MPs, please report under specific subjects what our representatives had to say. The reporting should be precise and news-worthy and aim to inform the people on various issues discussed in the parliament instead of publicising the useless and dull comments of each and every MP. It is also not necessary to print the photographs of the MPs.

I would also request that our MPs should make good use of the money we are spending on them by discussing issues of relevance to our daily life such as the acute housing, transportation, living conditions, the conditions of the roads and highways, chaos on the streets of Dhaka, lack of town planning, spiralling prices of commodities of daily necessity, the mushrooming slums along Gulshan lake and at other places in the city, the near civil war in educational institutes and hundreds of other problems we face every day which have made our life hard. Manzoor Choudhury Dhaka.