

A Welcome Visit from Japan

The arrival today of a high-level 47-member Japanese delegation representing the private sector and government agencies underscores the continuing interest of Tokyo in the economic development of this country.

The visit from what is the largest donor of assistance to Bangladesh is the first of its kind to take place after the democratically elected government took office in Bangladesh in March. The mission from Tokyo will thus have the first-hand opportunity of knowing the views of the new administration on its priorities as well as on its policy direction on such issues as trade, export, foreign investments and the transfer of technology from a developed country like Japan to Bangladesh. We believe that much of what the Japanese team will hear from our Government leaders, specially the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and Finance and Planning Minister Saifur Rahman, will correspond with the thinking of our distinguished visitors. For one thing, they will note with approval the new administration's determination to reduce, and hopefully eliminate, various forms of corruption and malpractices which, in the past, had caused erosion of confidence among investors. On this score, the team from Japan, like other visiting missions from abroad, would be impatiently waiting for definite results. We would not be surprised if the mission also takes a searching look at prospects of a durable industrial peace replacing what often looked like a free-for-all situation on the labour front during the previous regime.

The programme drawn up for the Japanese mission has several highlights. Among them the most important is the one-day Bangladesh-Japan Economic Forum meet on Monday which will be opened by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. The Forum will serve as a major encounter between the visiting delegation and the representatives of the private sector of Bangladesh. We sincerely hope that the deliberations at this forum will be frank and thorough, focusing on the practical aspects of Japanese investments in Bangladesh. Judging by reports available here, one school of thought in Tokyo favours Vietnam and other former Indo-China states as a new attractive field for investment from Japan, but the potential for future growth in South Asia specially Bangladesh and Sri Lanka has won considerable support from a cross-section of the Japanese entrepreneurs.

The visit of the mission to the Chittagong Export Processing Zone on Sunday is another highlight of the programme drawn up for the visitors. We hope that Japan will play its due part in the fullest revival of the CEPZ within the shortest possible time.

The success of the visit lies not only in promoting the case of Bangladesh as a country of impressive growth potential but also in reaching a consensus on the adoption of new measures on this score. In this context, the Forum on Monday should take a close look at what can be done to avoid double-taxation between Japan and Bangladesh involving investment and trade. The same should be done on prospects for the introduction of Japanese Overseas Investment Guarantee Scheme which, we are told, would facilitate the movement of Japanese capital to Bangladesh. A case can also be made for the Japanese participation in the development of human resources in Bangladesh, perhaps with the setting up of an institution to train young Bangladeshi men and women for jobs in other countries, specially in Japan which is now facing an acute shortage of skilled and semi-skilled manpower. If all these issues are threshed out at the one-day forum we shall regard the visit of the Japanese delegation as a major success.

Better Deal for the Aged

A training workshop with a difference concluded in Dhaka on Wednesday. The subject was 'Health and Welfare of the Aged.' Organised jointly by the World Health Organisation, Bangladesh Government and the Probin Hitoishi Sangha the workshop put forward many useful suggestions for the government to act upon and the society at large to take up.

The best idea from among these suggestions was to ask both society and government to see that the aged—or senior citizens in more acceptable parlance—are kept engaged. In fact here is an element of social values and practice involved that distinguishes the oriental society from the occidental. Our oriental ways do not treat the aged as so many social rejects. Mr Senior Citizen is very much an active member of the society as also a very powerful member of the family—if not quite the autocrat in the *pater familias* tradition. And Mrs Senior Citizen is only more so in many cases, specially on the family plain.

The traditional joint family is fast disappearing and the nuclear family is taking its place on a very massive scale. In such a situation our values about the place of the aged even if continuing intact would not be able to keep the seniors as engaged as is good for their health as also of the society's. That is what makes the workshop's call very pertinent. And bound up with this is another question of the need to see that people of skill and competence, expertise and experience do not cease to be of any use to society on reaching some particular age—with all their faculties and capacities unimpaired or even further sharpened. They can be involved very profitably without blocking room for the younger ones to come and fill.

A call has also been made for the government to pay the aged some allowances. This is a perfectly laudable idea depending however on the government's capacity to afford it. There should not be millions upon millions of people living past sixty-five in the land where national life expectancy averages out at 54 for both male and female. The question of will precedes that of affordability if eligibility to pensions is made adjustable to whatever suits the pocket between sixty and seventy.

The appeal for reserving seats in hospitals etc for the aged also deserves support and action. The root problem that affects all of the weaker sections of the society tells upon more cruelly on women, children and the aged—and that is the worst kind of poverty in the world that we have here. We have so far very positive and healthy social attitude towards the older ones. This will not be there if poverty continues to take toll of all human achievements of our society.

THE last week's coup has left the Soviet Union extremely unstable both politically and economically. Practically all the Republics have taken the advantage of the lack of central authority and either declared independence or are in the process of doing so. The Union is apparently fast disintegrating. The trend is unfortunate and may bring disaster for the Soviet people. This would also create serious uncertainty in the international political climate and bring unwelcome changes in the global balance of power.

There has been an undue rush by some countries to recognise the independence of Baltic states. It is one thing to announce decision to recognise the Baltic states as soon as constitutional formalities were completed with Moscow and another thing to give formal recognition and place envoys there. This clearly went against Soviet constitution and undermined the Soviet central authority which still exists and holds constitutional jurisdiction over the Baltic states.

Nobody denies the rights of the Baltic states to independence but these three Baltic states are at different stages of independence—Lithuania being at the most advanced stage. President Gorbachev finally backed the independence of the Republics but insisted that "negotiations must be started with those who wish to leave the Union." Though the situation of Baltic states are different from other Republics, they still have constitutional link with Soviet Union and unless this is sorted out the independence is not legally complete. Any recognition

INDEPENDENCE OF BALTIC STATES

Rush for Recognition Undermines Gorbachev's Authority

by Muslehuddin Ahmad

should await the completion of these formalities, otherwise actions will not conform to the international law and diplomatic requirements. The non-acceptance by the West of the annexation of the Baltic states by Soviet Union over fifty years ago may not absolve the West of their responsibility to observe the present political reality and resultant formalities.

The US approach has so far been appropriate. On independence of Soviet Republics,

military power and not destroying it.

Though Gorbachev has taken a very liberal attitude towards independence moves by the Republics, he has also warned that the Union of the sovereign states must be maintained and "union treaty" must be signed as soon as possible, otherwise he would resign. He said he did not want to preside over the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Though Gorbachev has taken a very liberal attitude towards independence moves by the Republics, he has also warned that the Union of sovereign states must be maintained.... He said he did not want to preside over the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

President Bush said, "I do not want to be a part of making mistakes that would be contributing to some kind of anarchy in the Soviet Union." On Baltics he said, "We are moving very close to total recognition, but there are some questions about what do you recognise" meaning thereby not only border issues but also the status of independence declared unilaterally and not yet cleared from constitutional obligations. Britain seems so far in line with the US approach. British Prime Minister is in the US for direct talks with President Bush. Again Britain is closely coordinating its policy with the US—apparently, this time for saving a

The preservation of the Union, even in a loose form, is necessary not only for the people of the Soviet Union but also for the 'free' world. Any break up of the Union would lead to total chaos—15 Republics probably except the largest Russian Federation, just released from Moscow's central command structure would have neither the experienced bureaucracy nor enough financial and other means to run the governments. So far it was all communist party's affairs—it used to run and control everything. With its dissolutions the states would be left with some uncoordinated and disrupted systems which would hardly be able to run indepen-

warned that it will have the right to question the borders with the states that do not want to sign the Union Treaty.

It means that Russian Federation would ask for annexation of the regions where the Russian population is substantial in size. This only indicates the extent and the gravity of the ethnic problems that lie ahead. The delegation of the Supreme Soviet has already been dispatched to Kiev to discuss the border situation that has developed between Russian Federation and Ukraine.

As the events are unfolding, one envisages a totally unsettled political situation in

that part of Europe as Yugoslavia is already in deep political turmoil. There is already a fear that if the Union is dissolved, there will be the rebirth of the Russian Empire.

All the smaller Republics are endowed with adequate natural resources and other industrial raw materials. Many of the Republics would have to depend on Russian Federation for supplies. Therefore, it would be difficult for them to pursue independent free market economic policy. British foreign secretary Douglas Hurd rightly said that one could not deal with 15 different Republics—15 different economies. If the trend of disintegration continues Russian Federation itself may break up into another 31 or so parts and then there would be 31 more to deal with.

When the European Community itself has been striving for political union, their policy should be positively directed against the break up of the Soviet Union. The EC as a Group was right in announcing that their recognition of the Baltic states should not automatically create

precedence for the other Republics. Apart from all other problems, in the event of dissolution of the Soviet Union, the free world would face another serious problem—the unchecked proliferation of Soviet nuclear arsenals. The West would do well by helping Gorbachev in reestablishing his authority. He is making his own effort, but anybody would have shivered for a while after such a great disaster. He has already blasted Boris Yeltsin for his decree on foreign exchange and Yeltsin's decree has apparently been cancelled. He has also asked Yeltsin to abide by Soviet law and not to encroach on his jurisdiction any more. For the West Gorbachev is indispensable. It is he who ignored Soviet's long friendship with some countries and discarded the traditional Soviet behaviour in the UN Security Council and supported the US and its allies, which changed the political and strategic situation of a region of the world. No Gorbachev—no glasnost—no perestroika—no freedom for East Europe—no freedom for Soviets—no Yeltsin—no Shevardnadze—no Gulf war under UN authority. The world political picture would have been quite different.

Therefore, the West should not do anything hurriedly that would further weaken Gorbachev. This would not augur well for the West. Nearly a century old communism is at present wounded and humiliated—not dead yet.

(The author, a former secretary and ambassador, is a regular writer on national and international affairs.)

The General who Casts a Long Shadow on Fiji

by Robert T Robertson

WHEN Major-General Sitiveni Rabuka left his post as Fiji army commander last month and joined the civilian government, heads turned. Only weeks earlier he had publicly plotted to overthrow it.

But then this central figure in the confused forum of Fijian politics has turned heads before. The coup he led in 1987 toppled the democratically-elected government of Timoti Bavadra, a government that would have given political clout to Fiji's majority Indian population for the first time.

Rabuka's coup was the first military intervention in South Pacific politics. It was followed within months by another coup when Rabuka effectively toppled the Fijian-led administration he had installed and headed government back to the chiefs.

Now as the nation heads for its first post-coup elections in mid 1992, nothing can be taken for granted—especially not Major-General Rabuka.

Back in early 1987, Rabuka, then Lieutenant-Colonel, was in the third most powerful position of the Royal Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) as Chief of Operations. But that was about as far as he could go because of Fiji's tradition of having chiefs in ruling positions. Rabuka was a commoner.

His chances of promotion were made even slimmer because the commander of the military, the son-in-law of Ratu Mara, the country's prime minister and one of its highest chiefs, sought to court martial Rabuka for disobeying orders.

Rabuka's star rose after the April 1987 general election that saw the 17-year-old Fijian-dominated government replaced by a reformist and multi-racial Labour government. Labour was in coalition with a revamped and largely Indian-dominated party.

Members of the former government, along with a shadowy semi-terrorist group known as Taukei (Fijian) Movement, vowed to overturn this challenge to chiefly, Fijian rule. When their activities failed to win popular support, they asked Rabuka to stage a military coup. Rabuka carried out the coup on May 14 and at the same time overthrew the top leadership in the armed forces, making himself military commander.

But the coup, which had purportedly been carried out in favour of traditional chiefly leadership, came unstuck when Governor General and high chief Ratu Ganilau refused to accept it. Ganilau established his own regime, bringing together the main political parties in a government of

The central figure in Fijian politics is still Major-General Sitiveni Rabuka, who led two coups in 1987, the last of which installed the current government. In May, Rabuka declared Fiji's government corrupt and mobilised his army reserves for a showdown. Then six weeks later he became a deputy prime minister in the same government. Rabuka's about-face left many commentators confused. What is clear is that Rabuka remains a force to be reckoned with.



MAJOR-GENERAL SITIVENI RABUKA

national unity.

Rabuka was furious and on September 25 launched a second coup, this time against the Governor General. He said chiefs should not participate directly in politics because they might be subjected to criticism unbecoming of their status. With the support of the Taukei Movement he formed his own government and declared Fiji a republic.

The Taukei movement supported the move. It was staunchly pro-Fijian and wanted to address what it called Fijian backwardness. It proposed a major redistribution of land rentals to villagers, angering the Fijian elite who were the main beneficiaries of rentals. The Taukei regime also imposed curfews, censorship and Sunday observance decrees, all of which cost them public support.

Aware of the slipping popular support, the wily Rabuka overturned his own government and reinstated the chiefs. Ratus Mara and Ganilau. Rabuka joined their 'Interim' government as home minister.

Relations between Rabuka and Mara were never good. Rabuka was irritated not to be offered the post of deputy prime minister. And he was beginning to wonder if chiefly goals and Fijian goals coincided. For that reason Rabuka maintained links with the Taukei movement.

The army's frustration with the chiefly government reached new heights in May 1988 when illegal arms shipments were discovered. Rabuka was convinced Chief Mara was stocking up on

weapons in preparation for a showdown with the army.

Tension between the military and the government continued to fester. When Mara proposed stepping down, senior army officials urged the return of a military government. Hearing that, Mara postponed his retirement and pushed Rabuka out of the cabinet.

In the next year and a half Rabuka was constantly on the move. Sometimes supporting government moves and at other times siding with opponents of the regime. What he desperately needed was a new power base. The army alone was insufficient and the Taukei movement discredited.

Industrial turmoil in early 1991 provided Rabuka the opportunity he had been looking for. The government's strong anti-union position led to protest from workers all over the country. In response, the regime passed draconian laws in May declaring strikes illegal in major sectors of the economy.

The unrest revived government fears for the future. Even a new racially-weighted constitution might not save it as urban Fijians viewed it with suspicion. To head off further Fijian division, Mara offered Rabuka his old position in the cabinet and a deputy prime ministership.

Rabuka refused the offer, knowing full well he was not popular with the rest of cabinet. Instead he publically declared the regime corrupt and won the support of trade unionists and opposition forces. He urged the government to resign and called up his army reserves. He even went so far as to prepare documents setting forth a new cabinet and president.

But at the height of the crisis Rabuka lost his nerve. Mara and Ganilau were not going to go quietly. To remove them would necessitate a coup and Rabuka did not wish to be portrayed as completely anti-chief. He backed off on June 12 but remained critical of the regime. On June 23 he argued for a revised constitution that would restrict chiefs to an upper house.

By mid July he changed

government ministers were angry but could do little. Rabuka had arrived with strength and, it might appear, with the goodwill of the regime's opposition forces—the same forces that had once been his sworn enemies. Clearly as the nation heads for the 1992 elections, Major-General Rabuka is not to be taken for granted.

OPINION

Development Mafia!

'We're taking fire from the frontline!'
'Where?'
'There!'
'Where?'
'Over there!'
'Over WHERE?'
'Over THERE!'

Sean Flynn, the combat reporter (and the son of the actor Erroll Flynn, if you're old enough to remember such things) heard this conversation go on for about fifteen minutes to see the humour of it at the time, nor the fact that it was, in a lot of ways, an Epiphany for the mess that became Vietnam.

Reading this, however, it brought to mind a totally unrelated, albeit just as messy, situation somewhat closer to home. Actually, if you call your Bangladesh, it is home. I was informally invited to a seminar of sorts at a local hotel (the one with marble floors and wood panelling), primarily as a 'rapporteur' of sorts. I must confess, I failed to display any originality whatsoever and insert Sean Flynn's experience there. It would have described the proceedings much more effectively and, I fear, with a lot less of the writer's cramp one is prone to when one is trying to write too fast.

Perhaps I could be a little less circumspect and explain. You see, the subject, or rather object as it was billed as a 'brainstorming session,' of the seminar was an investigation of the reasons for the singular lack of development in spite of the massive amounts of 'funding' from abroad. I'm afraid I haven't done justice to the actual name of the seminar—sorry, brainstorming session—but it's close enough to the real thing.

A fairly impressive representation of members of the international aid organisations, government secretariat and cabinet, and chambers of commerce was there. If one is partial to the description 'the development mafia', i.e. the gentlemen who are active in the business (and a very big business it is) of 'third world development,' one would consider this an informal meeting of the major 'dons' if not the 'capos' of the 'mafios'. My apologies to the ladies if I seem chauvinistic in my singular use of the male pronouns but, in my defence, none of the 'mafios' seem to be ladies. I suppose they have some Union Rules or something against that sort of thing.

In any case, the discussion held some promise insofar as one expected to see some

soul-searching and, hopefully, a possible solution to the ills facing this nation. Ever since independence, massive amounts of foreign-aid have been channelled to Bangladesh for projects ranging for industrial infrastructure development to rural child healthcare. Although there has been corruption commensurate with the amount of aid, there also have been sincere efforts by knowledgeable, honest, and intelligent professionals. But the nation still languishes, and children still perish.

However, the intentions of the organisers notwithstanding, the session rapidly degenerated into a long—and somewhat tedious—exercise in CYA that Cover Your A.... well, you get the idea. In fairness, there were some brave individuals who tried some honest and cogent thought, but the majority of the gentlemen preferred to describe, ad nauseum, the situation facing the country. So much so, that one had the—wholly uncharacteristic, one hastens to add—impulse to get up, grab them by their collective, and expensive, shirtfronts and tell them to 'extract finger and get on with it!'

After all, the situation is more of less clear. We are getting funding; we are getting bigger and bigger government projects; the twentieth century is encroaching evermore into our society; we have some of the largest fertiliser factories in the world; we have a labour force that is literally begging for work and we are acquiring an expanding pool of managers and technical professionals. Yet, despite the shellgame of statistics, the facts are equally stark at the other end. The funding is getting lost somewhere in the pipeline, 'system loss' has become a byword for this culture, the government's projects are obscenely unprofitable, society deals in ways that would make an inquisitor shudder, local food production is still abysmally low, people don't get work, and the managers hire incompetent 'consultants' while the professionals leave, perforce, for greener pastures abroad.

The situation was best summed up by a gentleman, he looked like a civil servant—an honest one, who said that perhaps we should question the very basis of development funding because of its failure to 'develop'. So far, the 'development process'—for want of a better word—has been one where a bunch of foreigners give us a lot of

money and then proceed to tell us, for a handsome fee, what to do with it. The 'us' in this case are indigenous members of the 'development mafia' who then formulate impressive-looking 'blueprints' for things that will never happen. On the other hand, if a 'local' has an idea (yes, those things still do happen around here), it becomes an uphill slog to get anyone to even listen to it, let alone agree to provide funding. In its bureaucratic inertia and arrogant ignorance, the 'development mafia' seems singularly uninterested in any ideas the 'poor unwashed masses' may have about the improvement of their own lot.

Unfortunately, in lingering too long on the problems, I seem to be joining our friends in the 'development mafia'. Like them I have no real solution, and perhaps it is better that way. For in our incessant prescriptions for it, we have ourselves become the problem. You see we the elite—intellectual and otherwise—that have run this country, or helped in its running, for the last century or so, have become bankrupt. Bankrupt both morally and intellectually. From the first murmurs of independence, we have consistently delivered disappointments for myriad promises made. Now, as members of the mafia (as the French say, 'plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose') we are just as consistently running this country and its hapless people into the ground. No, we are not its people. How can someone schooled in the social, economic, philosophical, and even scientific mores of systems thousands of miles away be considered one of the people of this country?

The problem with America's involvement in Vietnam was not that its men were being shot at from an unknown location by that they, the Americans, should not have been there in the first place! Similarly, the problem in Bangladesh is that the people deciding its future have not been asked to do so.

This nation has no emperor, though not for lack of effort by some, but it does have an elite, and it has had no clothes for quite some time. Perhaps it's time we said, 'we have no cloths' and quietly vacate the stage for its rightful owners. No matter the chaos and the pain, the decisions are theirs, for if the poor bugger is facing starvation, the poor bugger will get food, with or without our help. He can do no worse.