Uncertainty on the Campus

Dhaka University is set to re-open on September 17, even though no guarantee has been received about security on the campus once students return and classes resume. The Vice Chancellor, Dr Maniruzzaman Miah, had asked for such a guarantee from the four or five political parties whose student wings were known to have armed activists. It is probably more out of desperation than anything else that Dr Miah has had to go back on his words and re-open the university without the central issue of peace and security on the campus being resolved. Obviously, with the future of 28,000 students at stake, the university could not simply go on being closed.

The month and a half closure, which has compounded an already serious log-jam in course study and examinations schedules, has conclusively proven that there is a direct link between campus violence and session jams. The university needs time to solve the latter, but it is being denied that vital time by the former.

The government set up a committee soon after its assumption of office to deal with the question of session jams. We are yet to learn of any progress made by that committee or what the ministry of education has done to facilitate its work. Far from having a report and recommendations to discuss, we are not even sure if the committee is any longer a functional body. Recently, a parallel committee was created to look into the problem of session jams, but it is not entirely clear what guidelines the new committee has, nor if it is coordinating its "work" with the original committee. Why the education ministry has not found it necessary to inform the public, or at least the students and their guardians, about such a critical issue is a mystery.

Furthermore, a parliamentary committee was supposed to be set up to look for ways to find a solution to campus violence on the basis of an allparty consensus. Incredible though it may seem, that too has not come about. From the political side, there has been absolutely no action since last July's grand conference, which turned out to be more a public relations exercise than anything else.

Now, what is the general public to make of the government's and parliament's failure to address the issue in a constructive manner (as distinct from just making self-righteous speeches)? The public could well be forgiven for concluding that the government and other political forces lack sincerity in their repeatedly-claimed desire to eliminate terror from the campus.

Meanwhile, Chittagong University is nearing its anniversary of effective closure. It is difficult to imagine how a developing nation, which needs all the talent it can produce, can simply allow a university to spend a whole year without having any classes. But that is exactly what the government of Bangladesh has allowed.

We have repeatedly said that only sincere and resolute actions on the part of political parties could possibly solve this problem. That position remains unchanged. Closure of so many universities and colleges is not acceptable under any circumstances. All political parties, particularly the ruling one, have to realise that problems, however complicated, have to be solved through consultation, and not confrontation.

Indigenous Medicine: the Jakartan Lesson

Jamu is big business in Indonesia. And Jakarta is helping Jamu people to promote the native medicine into becoming a rage throughout the world — something that has happened with the Chinese Ginseng. Jamu is not just some particular concoction but is an extensive herbal pharmacopea. The populous Indonesian society, going quite against the westernizing socio-cultural trends, is keeping its faith in Jamu intact. Perhaps they are taking to it more than ever as factories producing these have more than doubled in less than past one and a half decade.

We in Bangladesh should find much of interest in the Indonesian preoccupation with indigenous medicine. Folk medicine is native medicine in all the societies in the world — arrived at empirically through tens of centuries of the village people's fight against diseases and for health. But neither Chinese nor Indonesian medicine is all folk medicine. These have systems and stem from medical approaches basically scientific in nature and practice. The Indian or the subcontinental medicine, as epitomised in the works of Charak and Susruta profoundly influenced all of eastern medicine - Arabic, Persian, Chinese and, of course, Indonesian. In the continued practice of the Ayurvedic system in Bangladesh, we are keeping that glorious heritage alive to this day. But are not doing that in any healthful manner. Ayurvedic or 'Kobiraji' medicine has been reduced to being the poor man's dubious cure.

The government has an apology of a support to it in the form of having a Homeopathic and Ayurvedic Board. Beyond this there's nothing for our indigenous wholly herbal medicine. The world is going very enthusiastically to fall for the herbal thing while we are letting such a wonderful legacy to slip through our uncaring fingers.

If we compare our national treatment of the herbal system with that of Indonesia's — we will get a clue to the decline of our own. The Indonesian government's mainstay of medicines in its public medicare programme is Jamu or the native herbal things. Our government would not possibly ever come even to think of such a thing.

Lately there has been a wave of setting herbal medicare centres in the city evidently not only aimed at health but also at keeping the figure and fashion. One has nothing against such developments taking place in the absence of more organised and nation-sized endeavours in the matter. But perhaps a kind of regulatory overseeing should be well-advised if only to guard the good thing earning a bad name and becoming quite usual in spite of its proven potency in fighting diseases and ensuring health.

BY-ELECTIONS

Early Test for Government and Opposition

OMORROW'S by-elections will not cause a change of govern-That much is certain, even in the unlikely event of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) failing to win a single seat. But the polls still represent an ideal opportunity to sample the new government's ratings with the public at an early stage - just 181 days since being sworn-in.

The spread of the constituencies - five in the north, two in the south and four in the centre on the country, including two in the nerve-centre of Dhaka - gives tomorrow's polls a fairly representative character.

This is slightly marred by the fact that four of the northern constituencies are bunched together in one district, Rangpur, where the single issue of Ershad set it apart from the rest of the country in the general elections of February 27.

Still, it is rare to have such a nice spread, and the results should provide electoral analysts with a good deal of raw materials with which to build scenarios for the future.

At the very least, prime minister Khaleda Zia's BNP needs to retain all the four seats its leader vacated in order to substantiate its claim that it still enjoys the kind of public confidence which propelled it to power six months

But, because of repeated claims made by BNP leaders about fulfilling its elections promises and the favourable circumstances the party enjoys by virtue of being in government, it would also be necessary for the BNP to actually gain a seat or two to fully establish its credibility.

Khaleda Zia currently has a vital advantage over her main rival, and that is constant and

Fat any time in the past

writer had produced the

text of a political thriller

embodying a drama such as

unfolded in Moscow in the

three days August 20-23,

1991, a publisher would surely

have rejected it as utterly

just don't happen like that,"

the writer would have been

told. "There's nothing wrong

with the story of a coup by

hard-liners backed by the KGB.

But the bungling of the plot-

ters, and the collapse of the

coup in the face of popular re-

sistance, and just too fanciful

themselves, notably the

overnight emergence of

Russian President Boris Yeltsin

as a fairy-tale hero, was the

speed with which they devel-

oped. The world's political

commentators were left liter-

A good example of this

breathlessness was provided by

a daily 15-minute radio news

programme, "Dateline East

Asia," put out by the BBC World

Service from London. In most

parts of the region it is heard

On the night of August 20

As astonishing as the events

"In the real world things

implausible.

for words."

ally breathless.

late in the evening.

five years an imaginative

favourable exposure on the state-owned mass media. However, another major advantage the prime minister has is the fact that six months may not be long enough a period to judge any government's worth.

Mistakes can easily be excused as 'early-day jitters'. while success can be trumpeted as signs of a fast-maturing government. The public itself may be willing to look for positive signs, and excuse early blunders, in a new gov-

But, failure to gain any seats would leave a question mark hanging uneastly over the popularity of Zia's government, given all the advantages of incumbency. On the other hand, loss of any single one of the

by Sabir Mustafa

electorate that it is worthwhile to vote for a party that has already lost the battle for power. Many people in this country consider it a "wasted vote" if it does not produce a winner, and the AL is already a "loser" by being in opposition. It's a monumental psychological barrier to break down, but that is the task facing the AL.

Naturally, the AL's first task would be to hold the three seats it won on Feb. 27. But that is the absolute minimum required by a party struggling to regain its position as a party of government. It is vital that it gains seats - whether at BNP's expense or the Jatiya

opponents left the AL with more eggs on its face than it probably deserved. A good performance in the capital is, therefore, as much necessary to redress hurt pride as to regain lost political ground.

Judging by the more business-like campaigning by AL cadres and the large number of people attending its rallies, a revival in the party's fortune in the capital has been discernible for some weeks. However, it remains to be seen whether that revival is strong enough to overturn Khaleda Zia's formidable 25,000-vote majorities in the two city seats.

For its part, the JP has concentrated all its heavy artillery

ties are concerned, the Rangpur Four are there for the taking. The question for the JP is, how widespread, and even or uneven, the disintegration and re-distribution of the

"Ershad votes will be. For the general public, a major question or two needs to be answered through the conduct of these by-elections. After the euphoria of a free and fair polls held in a perfectly neutral manner by a non-party government on Feb. 27, we are now faced with the more sobering reality of a partisan government at the control of the election mechanism.

Police, district and upazilla administrators are all under ministries now controlled by elected politicians with a di-

rect interest in the results of

the polls. Unquestionably, any

partiality on the part of these

people, or any attempt by the

government to persuade them

to bend the rules would seri-

ously retard the democratisa-

for ensuring a fair polling,

however, lies on the shoulders

of the Elections Commission

(EC). Presiding Officers at

polling stations can demon

strate the EC's neutrality by

treating polling agents of all

The voting public needs to

candidates with equal impor-

be able to see polling stations

under complete EC control,

otherwise the Commission's

hard-earned reputation may

suffer a major setback. Any

tarnishing of the EC's clean

image could jeopardise the

credibility of the whole elec-

tance and considerations.

The biggest responsibility

tion process.

Another question exercising the public mind appears to have been largely answered, which, unfortunately, has not been to the satisfaction of a great many people's expecta-

The Baily Star 4

This relates to the use of government facilities and media during polls. It was expected, as a result of an enhanced sense of fair play in the wake of the Feb. 27 experience, that state-owned media would not be used for party political ends as in the pre-Shahabuddin days.

It has not taken Bangladesh Television (BTV) much time to revert to its bad old days of projection of government leaders through news bulletins

and other programmes. Coverage of ministers performing important official tasks is one thing, but when slot after slot goes to ministers engaged in election campaigning with party symbols shown in close-ups, the question naturally arises as to whether BTV is trying to influence voters.

It is obviously too late to do anything about BTV, for the purpose of these by-elections anyway. But the experience clearly shows that whether the party in power is an autocratic and unrepresentative" one, or a "democratic and accountable" one, the desire to control and use the electronic media for party purposes is prevalent in all.

Perhaps it is a reflection of our lack of a democratic culture. After these elections, it will become all the more necessary to make BTV and radio (both financed by tax-payers of all political views) autonomous and politically neutral, in order to nurture a tolerant political culture that is receptive to a plurality of views.

Party (JP)'s - in order to pro-

For the general public, a major question or two needs to be answered through the conduct of these by-elections. After the euphoria of a free and fair polls held in a perfectly neutral manner by a non-party government on Feb 27, we are now faced with the more sobering reality of a partisan government at the control of the election

four seats she vacated would be a major setback.

mechanism.

Most alarming, from the BNP's organisational point of view, would be defeat in any one of the two Dhaka seats. The capital, which revealed itself to be as robustly pro-BNP on Feb. 27 as Rangpur was pro-Ershad, is now considered to be an invincible fortress of the ruling party. Any sign of erosion of support in Dhaka after only six months in office would send shockwaves through BNP

For the Awami League, the polls present an opportunity as well as a challenge. The opportunity is to increase its numbers in parliament and, more importantly, put the ruling party on the defensive at an early stage in the fifth Jatiya Sangsad's five-year term.

The biggest challenge faced by the AL is to persuade the

the programme paraded a suc-

cession of respected commen-

tators to assess the likely im-

pact of the upheaval in Moscow

on this and that Asian nation.

In crude and partial summary,

these specialists concluded

that the coup would be gener-

ally welcomed by the political

leaders in Beijing, Pyongyang

and Rangoon. Correspondingly,

it would cause dismay among

On the following night,

Chinese and Burmese dissi-

August 21, when it was appar-

ent that the coup was rapidly

falling apart, another team of

commentators was assembled

who had the task of radically

revising - in some cases, to-

tally up-ending - the opinions

aired 24 hours previously.

Now, for instance, it was re-

formist and pro-democracy

movements that would feel sat-

isfaction; and displeasure and

unease would be the reaction

transformations and reversals

which have occurred so

rapidly, any further assessment

of the likely spin-off effects on

Asia has to be tentative and

provisional. It is worth bearing

in mind, also that the curtain

may not yet have fallen on this

In view of the startling

of authoritarian regimes.

vide its activists and supporters with hopes for a return to power in the not-too-distant future. By the time this parliament completes its term in 1996, the AL will have been out of power for a long 21 years, which is enough to destroy the morale of any activist.

There is no shortage of political analysts in this country who saw the 30 per cent share of votes the AL's 264 candidates polled on Feb. 27 as the performance of a party in irreversible decline. The AL needs to seize this chance to confound its critics and put itself on an upwardly-sloping curve.

This would require the party improving its share of votes right across the III constituencies, and especially Dhaka. Defeat of party leader Sheikh Hasina in two Dhaka constituencies on Feb. 27 to a couple of pretty light-weight

drama. Further twists and

As regards political and se-

curity issues, the failure of the

attempted plot will have a far

less traumatic effect on Asian

policy-makers than if it had

succeeded. The return to

power in Moscow of hard-line

Communists bent on setting

the clock back ideologically (if

not economically), would have

required a close reappraisal of

been the overriding priority.

The Japanese leadership,

been more insistent than be-

fore in its view that the

American Seventh Fleet exerts

a vital and salutary influence

for stability in East Asia.

Likewise, in Manila the hand of

those favouring a quick ap-

proval of the new Subic Bay

base agreement would have

As things are, the defeat of

been strengthened.

among others, would have

"Safety first" would have

regional defence priorities

to mention only one area.

turns have to be expected.

Quentin Lee writes from Manila

The dramatic upheavals in Moscow have

put a premium on cautious political

decision-making in East Asian states

in the Rangpur sector, in the hope of riding on the crest of party chairman Hussain Muhammad Ershad's personal standing in the district.

The presence of such old campaigners as Shah Moazzem Hossain, who withdrew from his Munshiganj constituency in the general elections, and Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury who lost in his Chandpur area for the first time in his life on Feb. 27, has made Rangpur the focus of curiosity.

The JP needs to hold on to all four seats to demonstrate its strength as a party, rather than as a mere reflection of Ershad's past glory. But both the BNP and AL are putting in determined efforts, apparently sensing a disintegration in Ershad's personal block of

As far as the latter two par-

the hard-liners in the Kremlin

has taken the global heat out of

the crisis, and defence plan-

ners will no longer feel so

pressing a need for cautionary

Yet it would be unwise to

conclude that the situation has

reverted to what it was before

August 20. Any upheaval in any

key centre of power in the

world has the inevitable effect

of putting a premium on cau-

tious policies in adjoining ar-

eas. There may be sighs of re-

lief that the worst did not

happen; there will also be a

wary consciousness that simi-

lar upheavals and crises could

premium on "safety first" poli-

cies and decision-making.

"Wait and see" will be a com-

mon-sense watchword likely to

nomic implications, the initial

conclusion of many commenta-

tors has been that the routing

of the plotters has almost mag-

When it comes to the eco-

be invoked from now on.

Thus there will still be a

contingency measures.

The Coup that Failed, and the Moral for Asia

The reality is that East Asia now has an indelible trackrecord of economic advance going back more than two decades. Investments in the region have paid very handsome dividends. And there is no evidence that the pace and dynamism of economic growth in the countries of the Asia-

Pacific Rim are diminishing. Over the past two years, representatives of the "minitiger" states of Asia (with Hong Kong's Governor David Wilson conspicuous among them) have been conducting intensive sales tours" of North America

tainly their watchword.

and Western Europe. Without denigrating the economic aspirations of former Communist states, their message has been that the process of conversion to market systems in those countries will be a slow and tentative process. In East Asia the market system is a home-grown and produc-

> great weight. Indeed it may now be heeded even more attentively than before.

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.

Check anarchy

Sir, We heaved a sigh of relief when the chapter of autocratic rule of Ershad's regime came to an end. But our sigh of relief seems to be short lived. The reasons are not far to seek because when we look around we see the over-all condition of the country has deteriorated to the extent of anarchy. It appears that the country or everything is running like an unbridled horse. The nation has lost direction for achieving its desired goal. Anarchy in offices, public places educational institutions is rising to the increased suffering and agony of the people. Delinquent activities are rampant due to loose administration, lack of implementation of rules of law and code of conduct. Looting, arson, killing, snatching, molestation of women are still or have become order of the day.

The crimes and maladies call for immediate action and solution. If the present condition is allowed to continue where the saner elements of the society will go ! People ask who are accountable for the chaotic condition, and they always blame the ruling elite. But they also seek redress from the same source; naturally, from where else ! But we must

not be despaired of, we have to hope against hope. I offer my following humble suggestions for tackling the situation.

(i) Mass education can play a definite role for all round development. Education is key to success, it signifies civilisation. No nation can prosper without education. Education must be made compulsory and free up to a utility level and all steps must be taken to make education modern and job oriented.

(ii) Creating new avenues of employment is a vital issue, which is adding fuel to the causes of people's unrest. Every year thousands of educated youths come out from colleges and universities but they find no job not for their own fault. In this regard new mills and factories and development oriented services must be created to absorb them beneficially.

(iii) Boosting moral values through mass media like newspaper, TV, Radio will check erosion of humanity in the society. We have to find out the causes of moral erosion and degradation and nip them in the bud. Saner elements in the society should extend their helping hand while Radio and Television through their programmes and newspapers and magazines through their articles and features should play

the effective role. (iv) Enhancement of salaries and wages as well as incentives and facilities to our working force is necessary. It is deplorable that the salaries, wages, facilities and incentives for our working force are very shy here in comparison to other countries. This is a great bottleneck in the way of development. This has to go, if necessary, by reducing the same

in the upper strata. (v) Fulfilment of reasonable demands of intellectuals like lawyers, doctors, professors, journalists, teachers are also necessary because intellectuals are the backbone of the society. Their co-operation is imperative for country's welfare and development. Rational utilisation of revenue can show way out.

(vi) Bringing down the prices of essentials is the key to ninimise main cause of unrest. The prices must be brought down within the reach of common people's purse. This can be achieved to a great extent by checking the greed of the vested quarters.

Naushed Rahman Naya Paltan, Dhaka

Random thoughts

Sir, The random thoughts as follow have been flashing in my mind in recent days to which the relevant authorities may give some attention in the national interest:

1) Power plus authority plus implementation equals stabil-

2) Power minus authority equals impotence. 3) Power minus authority

minus implementation equals 4) The shortest-lived solution to any problem is ap-

peasement. 5) If one negotiates on one knees on Tuesday, one wil have to negotiate prostrate on

6) Bureaucracy nourishes it self on its own inefficiency.

For 200 years, a maximum of 50,000 Britishers (helped by another 250,000 British Indians) administered 1.5 million sq. miles and 400 million diverse people. We call them "imperialists, colonialists and exploiters". The Pakistanis, whom we call even worse names, managed with about 300,000 for 365,000 sq. miles and 140 million people usually at each other's throats. Why, then should an homogeneous people of 110 million on 55,000 sq miles require more than a million administrators to govern them? A more pragmatic referendum would be "can we afford such an unwieldy bureaucracy, where 1% is pampered with 20% of the revenue budget for doing very little for 99% of the people". Never have so many been so harassed and frustrated at such cost by so few. The answer to such a referendum will definitely be, that we do not need more Government but less -much

Quazi Akhlaque-uz-Azeem. Anderkilla, Chittagong.

ically transformed Gorbachev's chances of winning immediate substantial aid from the West, for all President Bush's assertions that there will be the same pre-requisites (including root-and-branch overhaul of the Soviet economy) as before.

Indeed, so magical has the change been that some American correspondents have raised the possibility promptly discounted by Mr Bush — that there may have been an element of charade in the whole Moscow drama, with Mr Gorbachev taking a privy part in a contrived crisis.

The key question, therefore, for many industrialised and industrialising countries in Asia is: "Will any new surge of Western aid and investment for the USSR and for Eastern Europe be at the expense of trade with Asia and investment in Asia?" In one word, the answer

has to be no. Even more than politicians and defence planners, industrialists and bankers have reason not to let idealism cloud their perceptions of reality. Caution is cer-

tive actuality. This message still carries

- Depthnews Asia

OPINION

An Avoidable Human Tragedy

Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) has been in a state of suspended animation for well over two months. If it is allowed to remain so any longer, it will be impossible to prevent its otherwise preventable collapse, which is exactly what the global Jewish press is determined to hasten. And this is exactly what makes the Third World's demand for a new in-

urgent and indispensable. Speaking about the BCCI Bangladesh, thousands of its innocent clients and employees are passing their distressing days like sacrificial animals waiting to be mercilessly slaughtered. With their present and future frozen, they are, in fact, more dead than alive.

formation order all the more

And what is their fault? None at all. BCCI Bangladesh has not been and cannot be proved guilty of money laundering or drug trafficking or even unconventional banking practices. On the contrary, it can legitimately claim to be a sound, solvent, viable and a model financial institution. Yet it is being treated like the proverbial lamb facing persecution by an invisible wolf.

Among its depositors and other clients there are some who wield considerable influence and power. They have raised their strong voice to protest against any violation of their rights and they can make their voice heard

But who will defend the poor employees, the probable victims of injustice and inhumanity. Instead of being rewarded for their honest and efficient service, they are

threatened with loss of jobs and the consequent bankruptcy and their families are condemned to endless uncertainty, frustration, starvation, social degradation and dehumanization.

Gainful employment is a fundamental and constitutional right of every citizen. Every welfare state recognizes this right and its own obligation to provide jobs or some sort of financial support to the jobless. But in a country like ours, where unemployment continues to be a chronic problem, even a large number of employed people may become unemployed for no fault of theirs and without anyone feeling accountable for such a catastrophe.

Employees of BCCI Bangladesh find themselves in such predicament. Their only chance of survival seems to lie in the hope that the present popular democratic government of Bangladesh will consider it its moral and human obligation to save thousands of citizens from the impending doom, not by providing jobs, but simply by helping them retain the jobs they have, not by creating a new institution but by letting the existing one live and function.

If this unwisely created crisis cannot be averted and thousands of men, women and children are forced to commit hara-kiri en masse rather then live in misery and indignity. the people's government will, at least in the estimation of humanity, be associated with an unprecedented human tragedy.