

The Daily Star

Dhaka, Friday, September 20, 1991

And Now, to the Task of Development

Now we are back to the point from where we should never have shifted. But this coming back is in all sense a magnificent step forward. After 16 years of disastrous experimentation with a form of government which was neither democratic nor suitable to the genius of our people we are now back to where we started from. The system of government that was won through a bloody liberation war, given legal shape through a most democratic and liberal Constitution and which was almost whimsically, irresponsibly and undemocratically (in the sense that no attempt was made to consult the people) thrown by the way-side, has now been brought back. It was that retrogressive deviation of January '75 that has put the country and our people through the traumatic experiences of the politics of assassination, coups, military uprising, putche and the wasted years of autocratic rule. Those lost years have cost the nation dearly in falling behind our development goals and providing the basic needs to our people — in short, fulfilling the dream of our liberation.

All this is now blissfully behind us. With the last Sunday's referendum we have hopefully put the last nail in the coffin of autocracy and illegal capture of power. The challenge now is to turn the democracy that is being instituted at the highest political level to concrete actions for the people.

The oath-taking of the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia along with her 21-member cabinet and 15 state and three deputy ministers marks the final step in our transition to democracy and parliamentary form of government. The long cherished goal of having an accountable and genuinely representative government has at last been fulfilled. A very important feature of the re-introduction of parliamentary form of government in our country is that it has come about through a process of political consensus and after fulfilling every legal and Constitutional requirement.

Now, however, the real task begins. Through the referendum we have got ourselves a real parliament and a Prime Minister who is the chief executive of the government. There is now no impediment in the way of Begum Zia beginning to govern the country in the real sense of the term. Much was made of the dual authority in the system of administration that existed since last February. All obstacles preventing the Prime Minister from exercising real power have been removed. It is the expectation of the people that real governance will now begin.

Let there be no illusion, least of all among those in power that the task facing the new government is an easy one. Our needs are not only many but they are also urgent. Nothing, in a real sense, can wait for tomorrow. And this large social and economic agenda will have to be addressed with a resource base which is not only inadequate but is largely aid based. To fulfil the gigantic task of development through a democratic and accountable system means that the elected government must receive the support and co-operation of all sections of our people and all factions of our political force. Let us not forget that in a democratic system, especially a parliamentary one, it is the people who are in power not just the party that gains the majority. For the system to succeed, the party in power and those in the opposition must co-operate specially if we want to reach the fruits of democracy to our people.

Cuba and the US

The Soviet Union's decision to withdraw its 11,000-strong military training brigade from Cuba is well in keeping with the policy of global disengagement initiated by President Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s. The recent collapse of Communist Party rule in Moscow merely hastened the announcement feared by President Fidel Castro of Cuba for sometime.

Castro had never tried to conceal his displeasure with Gorbachev's perestroika, and he would have had a lot to look forward to had the hardline attempt to reassert its control in Moscow last month succeeded. But with the Soviet Communist Party virtually overthrown and both the military and the KGB acknowledging the new reality, Castro's worst fears — a Cuba deserted by the Soviet Union economically, politically and militarily — are about to come true. This, Castro feels, means that there will be nothing to prevent the United States from carrying out a military action to overthrow Latin America's only surviving socialist regime.

Castro knows the US does not have to launch a Grenada-style invasion from a carrier fleet. There already are several thousand US troops on Cuban soil — at the US-controlled enclave of Guantanamo Bay at the far-eastern tip of the island. For the past 32 years, the Cuban government has tried but failed to get the US to leave its territory. Washington, which never shirks from lecturing other countries on the wrongs of sitting on other people's property, never saw anything wrong with its own defiance of Havana's sovereignty over Cuban land. The US claims that the Bay was leased to it in perpetuity by Cuba at the end of the US-Spanish War of 1898, which led to Cuba winning independence from European rule.

While we are in no position to dispute the legal status of the US claim, we can and do claim the right to contest it on moral and political grounds. We are now living in an age when old principles of colonial conflicts and possessions are no longer acceptable or applicable. It would have been quite logical for the US to leave the Bay at Havana's request, but it chose not to because it wanted to maintain an indirect but permanent military pressure on communist Cuba, following the CIA's failure to overthrow Castro in 1961 and thereafter. The growing Soviet influence in Cuba was also used as a justification for the US presence. But Cuba too needed the Soviet presence to deter any hostile US move.

With Soviet withdrawal now a matter of time, the US should demonstrate its respect for the new world of free, sovereign nations by reciprocating. Maintenance of the Guantanamo base after the disappearance of the much-feared "Soviet threat, looming only 90 miles off the Florida coast," would only show the US up to be a regional bully intent on brow-beating a small neighbour. And that is certainly not the image we expect the US to project of itself. As for the communist system and Castro himself, the Cuban people will deal with that when and as they choose — just as Eastern Europe did.

THERE is no doubt in my mind that the West, in particular the Group of Seven (G-7) industrialised countries, is to a very large extent responsible, not only for the recent events in the Soviet Union, but also for what is bound to happen in the near future there if the policies do not change.

Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev had come to the end of the road. The Soviet economy has been collapsing for the past four years, and has declined even more rapidly in 1991. Production is down in practically all economic sectors, including in such highly sensitive branches as wheat and oil production.

The political structure has been collapsing at about the same speed as the economic structure. The central problem was how to keep control of the economic and political decentralisation process when emerging from a centuries-long tradition of highly centralised and highly bureaucratised decision-making, first under the tsars and then under the Communist Party.

By the summer of 1991, Gorbachev's power was seeping away from all sides, the economy was in even deeper trouble, the anarchistic tendencies inherent in any transition period continued to increase in strength, and the republics clamoured more and more loudly for their independence.

The G-7 summit in Houston in the summer of 1990, instead of coming forward with frank and massive support, commissioned a study from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the European Community and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

These organisations studied diligently and produced a three-volume report which basically concluded the following: no massive financial assistance should be given to the Soviet Union before Gorbachev's economic house was in order and the relationships with the republics regularised.

In other words, financial assistance would be forthcoming once all the problems in the Soviet Union had been

For South, Good News via Moscow

Massive Western assistance to the Soviet Union, now considered inevitable, could very well set an example for Western action in the South, also struggling under economic readjustment, writes Louis Emmerij, president of the Development Centre at the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), from Paris.

settled. This is, of course, reminiscent of the way many banks act: they give you an umbrella when the sun shines and take it away when the rain begins.

What the Soviet Union needed urgently was to get out of the transition period and into a time of consolidation. What it needed was to get food into the shops and heat into the houses.

One way of achieving this was through a conservative coup. But because conservatives are rarely intelligent, this failed. Which leaves us with the other possibility, which should have been enacted much earlier, namely massive and sincere external assistance from the West.

In Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the world is in a period parallel to 1948, when

the United States instituted the Marshall Plan for Europe. We now need Marshall Plan for Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, accompanied by the equivalent of what, in the 1950s, was called the European Productivity Agency — the organisation that provided technical assistance, particularly in what we now call human resources development, as a complementary measure to the financial flows of the Marshall Plan.

If the outcome of the conservative coup in Moscow will be to change Western policy in this direction, then long live the coup.

Some in the developing countries have attempted to draw a parallel between the situation in the Soviet Union and the adjustment programmes, in the South, accompanied by IMF and World Bank conditionality.

This parallel is only partly valid. Indeed, the situation in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is infinitely more complex than that in the developing world. There is a huge difference between moving from a Stalinist variety of socialism to Western market economy methods, and introducing more effective policies into developing countries which, on the whole, are already functioning in the capitalist orbit.

In Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, we are confronted with the unprecedented problem of the economies of transition. The transition from a centrally planned economy — in which the ownership of the means of production and land is con-

tinued essentially in the hands of the state to a market economy, in which the ownership of the means of production and land is in private hands — raises a series of questions.

These include: how to privatise an economy? To whom does one sell the enterprises? With what money will people buy shares? Where can the new managers of privately owned companies be found where none have been trained for that type of activity, and even worse, none have exercised it in the past 40 to 75 years? What about competition? How to liberalise foreign trade? What type of management tools are available for a new market economy-oriented government?

Similar questions can be asked in the domain of agriculture. Problems of ownership in agriculture, but also in the industrial, services, and real estate areas, will have to be settled before governments can embark on large-scale, or even small-scale, privatisation. In the Soviet Union in the 1930s and in most Eastern European countries in the late 1940s, industry, services and agriculture were all nationalised with no compensation given to the former owners. Within the framework of the re-establishment of the rule of law in these countries, therefore, the problem of the status of former owners must be settled first.

These are hugely complicated issues for which we have neither practical experience nor theoretical insights. The move from one world to another is very different from the problems facing the bulk of the developing countries. The latter remain in the same world, but need to adjust their economic financial and social policies to adapt to a quickly changing global economic situation.

I for one believe that the so-called conditionality imposed

by outside governments and organisations or, indeed, by governments themselves, has evolved in a positive direction. More and more developing countries have passed through a "silent revolution" and have learned lessons from experience. The same applies to the IMF, the World Bank and many of the donor countries.

There is, however, a parallel between what has happened in the developing countries and events in the Soviet Union today. At the beginning of the 1980s, it was true that the sharper edges of conditionality reflected a definite lack of confidence in the capacity and credibility of governments in developing countries.

This was not always wrong, but it led to the introduction of excessive policies which, in turn, have sometimes been more harmful than strictly necessary.

There is no doubt that the absence of date of unconditioned and massive external assistance to the Soviet Union has been equally caused by a lack of confidence in the leadership of the Soviet Union and its capability to conceive and implement a coherent set of policies.

I hope that what has happened recently in the Soviet Union has convinced the Western world, and in particular the G-7, that the situation is not only extremely complicated and unprecedented, but also that we must avoid the circular reasoning about what comes first: plans or money with confidence now hopefully being restored, let us all sit down together and take action rapidly, consistently and simultaneously.

And this could well set an example for Western action in the South, which must also show more coherence and punch, even if the situation there is less complex. Paradoxically, then, good news may finally come to the South via Moscow — with love.

Louis Emmerij of the Netherlands is president of the Development Centre at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris.

Kaunda fights by TV and T-shirt in Multi-party Zambia

Elias Nyakutemba writes from Lusaka

One of the most important elections in Africa since the advent of multi-partyism is taking place in Zambia. Until a few months ago Zambia was a single-party state led by UNIP and President Kenneth Kaunda, the country's leader for 37 years. Now he faces a major challenge at the polls from trade union leader Frederick Chiluba.

No marching soldiers. Just mobs milling around, hero-worship fashion, lifting KK shoulder-high. The smoking torch or all-weather flame symbolising UNIP's supremacy (even though no more), pictures of wildlife, growling owls, howling hyena, grunting elephant, crocodile and hand-drawn election campaign.

The top players, President Kenneth Kaunda's ruling United National Independence Party (UNIP) and the main opposition, the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD), know there is no time to waste. The probable polling date, it is being whispered, is buried between the last 10 days of October.

An electoral war is on. From behind the screen comes a clear, soft Scottish voice: "For the past 27 years, UNIP ruined the economy and created potholes. Now vehicles get stuck, the economy is stuck. Nothing moves. The MMD aims to change all that, to get vehicles and the economy moving again."

A smooth stretch of tarmac road zooms right through the eyes and then the car — the same one — goes gliding down it without trouble.

The Scottish voice again with the real message: "Vote for the MMD and President Frederick Chiluba. Out goes the car, the road, and the voice. In comes the voice of reason and love."

The UNIP sound is different. A beautiful tune in several tones, an Afro-American feel, a Boarish growl and a central African backing mix. Zambia, it says, "the promised land, let's all unite and march together with UNIP. Vote KK."

As one economist put it: "The old one-party regime may have been repressive, but it was cheap. The new political

culture is very expensive — only the rich parties can win the election." The smaller parties have to remain silent.

Not just the news media are benefiting. Hundreds of thousands of supporters carry UNIP election messages back and front, on loincloths and one caps. Millions of T-shirts and tonnes of women's clothing materials have been distributed free.

A bitter joke going the round is that UNIP "is a good provider of T-shirts but the hospitals are without medicines." That is the centre of the education argument.

UNIP is trying to defend itself from opposition accusations that it has wrecked the economy — not easy to deny when the opposition puts the naked facts on the table.

An MMD advert attributes empty shopshelves to UNIP failure to achieve high productivity in industry. UNIP knows hundreds of shops stay closed and that the only goods available are out of reach of most Zambians.

Not to be outdone, UNIP adverts appeal to public fears of civil strife, disunity or chaos if the MMD comes to power. "Never take peace for granted," warns one advert.

That may not stick easily in a poverty-stricken environment, but both parties seem guilty of displaying dishonesty

and hypocrisy in the campaign.

UNIP says it is a democratic party now, even though at its

August congress in Kabwe it propaled Kaunda back to the party presidential post he has

been elected to.

The signs are that, in the lead-up to the general election, the advert war will become hotter and dirtier. Some adverts already warn people to beware of "snakes bent on selling the nation." Others say "candidate C is a liar and party B is full of political hyenas."

The Church and ten smaller parties call for restraint, but the players are new to the game and it may take quite a while for them to realise that confrontation does not always work.

The good thing, as one political observer sees it, is that we are in a new era, a new culture. The adverts are helping to provide a healthy election debate in this new era and, most importantly, at least the electorate knows who is likely to win, making it much easier for us to decide who to vote for.

— GEMINI NEWS

Exchange rate: \$1 = 68 kwacha

ELIAS NYAKUTEMBA has worked with Zambian Information Services since 1974. He co-ordinates regional newspapers, magazines and national radio.

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.

Will the Gamble pay off?

Sir, Our attention has been drawn to the post-editorial on the above subject by Zillur Rahman Siddiqui published in your esteemed daily on 13th September. After reading the column a natural question arises as to who is the gambler? The teachers, the late of vocational students, the Education Ministry or the guardians? In fact, campus violence is a sensitive and delicate issue. As the most vulnerable youth are involved, it cannot be tackled in conventional ways say police or policing. Because serious policing may be counter-productive and may

aggravate the situation manifold. Then what is the way out?

Universities must not be closed except on scheduled holidays or vacation. The university administration and the teachers must take it squarely as a challenge, come what may. They are in a better position to promote a peaceful campus in the long run as they will be backed by the silent majority. To our mind the government and the guardians are in periphery to help them out in the matter.

A. D. Rasulpuri,

16, Shanti Nagar, Dhaka.

Hartal again

Sir, A half-day hartal was observed in the country on September 14 at the call of Awami League in protest of alleged attempt on the life of party chief Sheikh Hasina, vio-

lence and rigging in the recently held bye-election.

With the return of hartal again in our national life it seems that something is going wrong. I strongly feel that the new democratic government pay full attention to these protests. We have valid reasons to believe that certain vested quarters are trying to discredit the democratically constituted government by creating anarchy and violence. They are conspiring to establish a issue against the new government.

But in reality, it may be evident that the government is working as per the demand and expectations of the people. The holding of referendum on 12th Constitutional Amendment Bill for establishing parliamentary democracy in the country is a concrete example of government's good will and intention to ensure people's welfare.

Meanwhile, we would suggest that the government should form an enquiry com-

mittee by taking members also from the opposition to investigate the allegations and sanction punishments to those who would be found responsible for the misappropriations.

M. Zahidul Haque
Assistant Professor,
Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka-1207.

Police station at Pearpur

Sir, In 1977 the then government decided to establish eight police stations in greater Mymensingh district in two phases. Though Pearpur topped the list of first four police stations, it was left out of implementation programme, whereas other seven police stations have duly been established and commissioned. Establishment of police station at Pearpur was found feasible and essential by the highest executive level of the country as well as by the different

levels of the police administration. Anti-social elements and absconding criminals of Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Muktagacha and Nakla of Sherpur use the adjoining area of Pearpur as their safe refuge because there is no PS at Pearpur, and thus pose a serious threat to law and order situation.

For the sake of peace and security of local inhabitants immediate establishment of police station at Pearpur is of utmost importance. People of Pearpur justly expect that the present democratic government will establish and commission the much needed police station without further delay.

On behalf of inhabitants of Pearpur.
Mohammad Ali Akanda
Baraghuri, Pearpur.

The operation has hatched a massive plan to undermine UNIP and its all-time tested leadership during the Congress at Mungunshi Rock of Authority and during the Presidential and Parliamentary elections.

ploy to undermine UNIP UNIP THE VOICE OF REASON AND LOVE SPEAKS HOW CAN WE PRESERVE PEACE?

By ensuring that we do not take peace for granted and by remaining united behind UNIP and its all-time tested leadership during the Congress at Mungunshi Rock of Authority and during the Presidential and Parliamentary elections.