Dhaka, Saturday, January 25, 1992

Need for Dialogue

Several pronouncements made by well-placed persons during the past week focused on the implementation of the country's economic policies, especially in the field of disinvestment, and indirectly touched on the problems encountered by the authorities.

While speaking positively on the stated policies of the democratically elected government of Begum Khaleda Zia, the US Ambassador to Bangladesh William B Milam stressed the need for maintaining a dialogue between the government and the business community. He, then, went on to suggest that the authorities could make "strong and positive" efforts to remove bureaucratic holdups which make it difficult for the private sector to function effectively. This was perhaps a diplomatic way of pointing out that much remains to be done by the present government to carry out these prescriptions which now form the basis of the country's economic policies. Again, Mr Milam spoke against the continuance of subsidies, unreasonable wage demands and protection of what he called "deathly sick industries." These views which formed part of the envoy's exchanges with members of the Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce on Thursday would raise no controversies. However, one might still say, as Foreign Minister A S M Mustafizur Rahman did in an interview to this paper a week ago, that in some areas, such as in privatisation and withdrawal of subsidies, the authorities could not be rushed. They needed more time to create necessary conditions for their implementation. There is, of course, the danger which Ambassador Milam probably had in mind that too much delay, in the name of preparation, would cause the loss of impetus and increase impatience among concerned quarters.

The need to act firmly and urgently is nowhere more important than in bringing discipline to the financial sector, the subject that was brought up a day earlier by Finance Minister Saifur Rahman. This too has been a stated policy of the government. Here, again, there is no clear evidence that the authorities are anywhere near achieving their objective. If anything, still in a mood of stagnation. the private sector, by and large, is taking a cautious view of new incentives announced by the banking sector in such fields as the opening of Letters of Credit and securing new credit. True, a new government does not immediately earn the confidence from a cautious private sector, especially where change of policies are concerned. But, in our view, the climate ought to start changing for

the better - now. Indeed, in some areas, the situation may well be getting worse. A body set up by workers of three large public corporations has expressed its serious reservations about some aspects of the government's disinvestment policy. The body's concern over possible retrenchment of blue collar workers, rather than of mid-level white collar employees, may well be valid. Fortunately, the body has not spoken up against the policy of disinvestment as such. What it is worried about is the lack of clear policy statements, the threat of losing jobs and some uncertainties about the management ap-

proach by the private sector. Somewhere along the lines, the policies of the government suffer from both lack of clarification, even where officials themselves are concerned, and inadequate communication. Rhetorical pronouncements are poor substitutes for intensive face-to-face dialogue with interested quarters, whether they represent well-placed business executives or low-paid workers from public corporations. Unless senior officials - indeed ministers themselves - appreciate the need for such a dialogue, they must accept advice - solicited or unsolicited — from foreign envoys.

Tapping the CIS Market

According to an agency story published in this and other papers last Wednesday, Bangladesh will soon enter into an agreement with Russia to revive trade links that existed previously with the recently-dismantled Soviet Union, followed by similar agreements with 10 other member-states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Late though the move is, in comparison to other countries such as India and Pakistan, the decision to plug into the potentially lucrative CIS market is a commendable one. Reports that a high-level government delegation led by a senior cabinet minister and including representatives from the private sector will leave for Moscow next month, is also a welcome one, since an early and direct approach is essential if we are to gain a foothold in the newly-emerging markets stretching from the centre of Europe to the Pacific Ocean.

The socio-political situation of most of the CIS states is still quite volatile, but that should not pose a serious threat to the prospects of bilateral trade. On the contrary, the prevailing shortages of consumer items, including foodstuffs, in CIS cities and towns make imports an absolute necessity in the short-run. The poor health of the Russian and other CIS economies, weakness of the rouble and the low purchasing capacity of the former Soviet people may well make highly-priced Western consumer products unattractive to CIS importers. Bangladesh, like other developing and newly-developed countries, can offer relatively cheap products of reasonable quality that would be more appropriate for a major portion of the CIS market under present circumstances.

In order to do our bit of marketing efficiently and comprehensively, the planned delegation needs to be staffed with as many professionals and as few bureaucrats as possible. The visit ought to be conducted in a strictly business-like manner, with selling of Bangladeshi products as its principal aim. Other, more cumbersome issues such as Moscow-aided projects, student scholarships etc.

can be dealt with separately.

The problems with trade, however, are not few. Russia and other CIS states are suffering from an acute shortage of hard currency, and therefore may only wish to conduct business on a barter basis, as was the case with the USSR previously. For Bangladesh though, the question of payment ought not to become an obstacle to establishment of trade links. The priority must be to get into the new markets and stay there. The government should do as much as possible to help the private sector take initiatives, including offering credit facilities for CIS purchases. The last thing we should do is nitpick over prices and mechanisms. The Soviet people stood by us in our darkest hour of need, and now we must show that we are prepared to help, within our limited capacity, as well as do business as reliable partners.

IMPROVING CYCLONE WARNING RESPONSE AND MITIGATION

How to Make Bay of Bengal Safer for Citizens?

MPROVING cyclone warning response and mitigation focuses on learning as much as we can about the application of sound disaster management theory and practice in respect of mitigating the impact of tropical cyclones in the Bay of Bengal. Much of our future success in achieving this objective rests with our foresight in implementing short-term readiness and longterm preparedness measures to take advantage of the modern capabilities of our national meteorological and hydrological services to monitor and issue warnings of approaching cyclones. The map of the Bay of Bengal presents a scenario which generally repeats itself several times each cyclone season.

A tropical disturbance forms in the south central Bay southwest of the Andaman Islands in the vicinity of latitude 10 deg N, progressively absorbs heat energy of the warm ocean over a period of several days, and intensifies into a severe cyclonic storm. Later the storm may develop a core of hurricane winds around a central "eye" as it moves away from its area of genesis to make landfall on the

A long-term climatology of cyclone tracks in the Bay of Bengal tells us that the new cyclone may well impact (landfall) in any of the countries, namely from Sri Lanka in the west, the four coastal States of eastern India thus to Bangladesh in the north and Myanmar in the east. This coastline totals about 5000 km. The length of coastline subject to the destructive winds of a cyclone making landfall may total only about 200 km, that is about 100 km on either side of its centre. So that the Bay of Bengal may be said to comprise a total of about 50 different potential "target" coastal sectors for the cyclone. Each of these overlapping "target" zones may comprise tens or hundreds of separate human settlements each possessing their distinctive physical and socie-economic hazard vulnerabilities and thus require individual warning and preparedness measures.

How it occurs? Cyclones are generally "steered" by upper-level air

currents in which they are

embedded. In low latitudes the

easterly steering winds are

generally light (which helps to concentrate the atmospheric energy needed for the cyclone's development).

It may be several days before the storm develops its own counterclockwise strong wind circulation around a discernible centre of rotation. Meteorologists at each cyclone warning centre around the Bay of Bengal, as well as at various global weather centres, closely monitor the storm's formation by a system of orbiting and geostationary weather satellites. The India Meteorological Department's Regional Specialized Meteorological Centre at New Delhi (RSMC). with the benefit of hourly imagery from its own INSAT domestic weather satellite, as part of the World Weather Watch system of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), issues daily weather bulletins which describe the main features interpreted from the satellite imagery with special attention to existing and developing tropical cyclones. These latter storms then become the subject of special cyclone advisory bulletins, issued twice daily, or more frequently, which provide a full technical description of the location, intensity, and motion of the cyclone, with forecasts of its predicted position in 12 and 24 hours' time. Several other global centres provide their estimates of the location and intensity of the cyclone up

to 96 hours ahead. It is the responsibility of each national or delegated regional cyclone warning centre around the Bay of Bengal to issuc information and warning advices about the cyclone to their own citizens and agencies and which sum up the perceived threat to their own country or region. Warning systems, warning terminology, and warning procedures, especially for warning the general public, are similar but not identical for the countries around the Bay of Bengal. Warnings for special purposes, such as for aircraft and ships, are closely standardised in conformity with international and regional agreements. For example the countries around the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea are members of the WMO Panel of Tropical Cyclones and have adopted an agreed re gional Cyclone Operational Plan which lists operational procedures between the members, as well as particular na-

dential election.

Sometimes his attitude bor

Kremlin rule over Georgia, a

small nation of 5.5 million, was

never easy. Its leaders were

too proud and independent to

be governed from faraway

charge that the president ex-

plotted his popular mandate

and took personal control of

courts, foreign ministry, police

and the National Guard. He

was accused of suppressing the

press and his political opposi-

tion. They also alleged that the

president showed intolerance

towards minorities, such as

the South Ossetians and

Gamsakhurdia's critics

without much culture.

Red Army

Moscow.

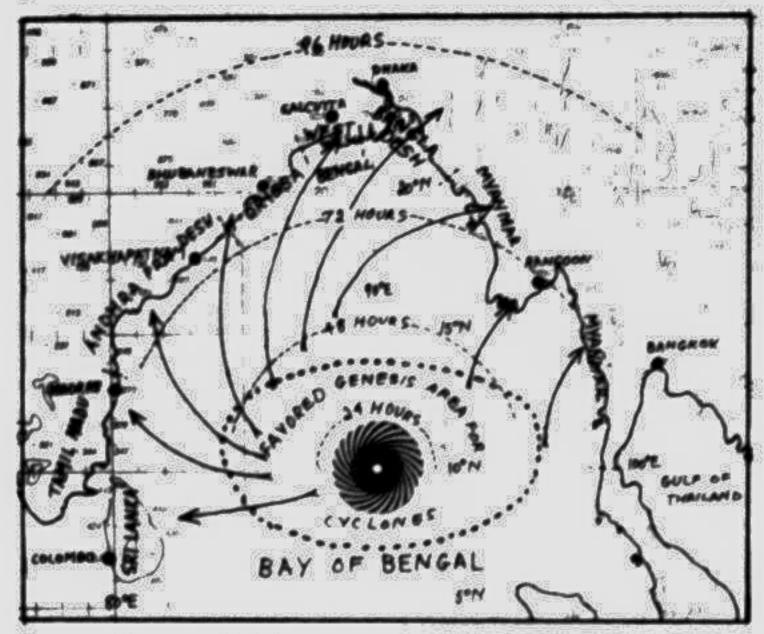
Abkhazians.

by R L Southern

tional procedures which apply No doubt the organizational objectives and stages of their national warning systems will be explained by representatives at our Workshop. In general several stages or phases are utilised which are aimed at providing selected warning lead times for the community and users. For examples the criteria for issue of an Alert is to give indication of possible landfall (or commencement of gale-force winds) within 24 to 36 hours. A full Warning may be issued when landfall for gales) are expected within 18 or 24 hours. Warning signal systems are also used by some countries. In theory, at least, the warnings are intended to provide sufficient time for the

Lanka or southeast India. Others will progressively curve more to the north under the influence of more southerly and stronger upper air steering currents and as they do so will generally increase in speed. So it is common for a cyclone to move initially towards the west and northwest and then to the north and northeast and occasionally to the east to strike the coast of Myanmar.

The map shows selected typical tracks of cyclone which vary between the pre-monsoon and post-monsoon cyclone seasons. Many tracks show that the average time occupied by a cyclone from its initial formation into a depression or cyclonic storm until it crosses



community to undertake preparedness measures to guaran tee safety and protection of

property to the extent feasible. Response to Warnings

The means of improving response, is firstly to improve the effectiveness of warnings by providing more useful. timely and meaningful information as the motivation for response activities, and secondly to improve the implementation of DPP contingency plans of action drawn up precisely for the purpose of protecting the community.

Consideration of the tracks of cyclone over the last 100 years shows that these follow a generally westward track in the low latitudes where some will cross the coast of Sri

the coast of a Bay of Bengal country varies from about 3 to 5 days. For convenience the mup shows rings of the distance travelled by cyclone forming at 10 deg N, 90 deg E. in 24 hours, 48 hours, 72 hours and 96 hours, based on speeds of 10 kph for the first 24 hours, then speeding up to 15 kph for the second 24 hours, then to 20 kph for the third 24 hours, and then to 25 kph for the fourth 24 hours. Of course, most cyclones will take more than 24 hours to travel at the stated speeds between each ring as they will be travelling at an angle and not directly between each ring, but the rings will indicate the minimum amount of time which exists in order for the

meteorologists to provide

proach to land of many cyclones, such as the last one in Bangladesh.

It is generally recognized around the world that deliberate warning "strategies" need to be instituted by national weather warning services in collaboration with DPP and other technical support services in order to maximise the usefulness of the available meteorological "intelligence" in serving the community and users with warning information. Clearly some users with very important preparedness tasks to perform, such as may require evacuation from offshore oil rigs, or who need to plan for the possibility of mass evacuation of people from exposed locations, need to be given special warning services other than provided in generalized warning statements, in order to have time to martial the required resources.

Other strategies need to be called into question at the workshop. At what level of authority should recommendations or instructions for major preparedness decisions, such as evacuation, be made. The higher the level, the greater the warning lead time that needs to be given to convene high level committees and then disseminate the advice to the public. In most flood warning systems, the abbreviated lead time associated with the rapid rise of rivers, especially in flash floods makes it imperative that major preparedness decisions be made locally. A densely populated highly vulnerable area, such as an Island group, needs to receive warnings with highest priority in order to evacuate to the main-

Check on Casualties

Just to keep a check on growth in casualties and damage we need to institute better ways of coping with cyclones. Are there well-proven procedures which have been used elsewhere and which could be adapted for the Bay ? For example in several cyclone basins the intensity or strength of cyclones is graded into a scale to 5, each number being equivalent to a stated increasing range of high winds or storm surge, which in turn may be expected to cause a stated degree of destruction in respect of local housing and vegetation. The Bay of Bengal is one of the few cyclone basins

where cyclone are not allog cated popular male or female names to facilitate reference to them in media releases and to heighten community awareness and interest in warning announcements. And what are the possibilities for increased government commitment in respect of higher building standards and land-use zoning and other structural and nonstructural mitigation measu-

At the recent ICWRM4 Workshop at the ADPC. Bangkok, a team of eight experts in various fields from Bangladesh, presented an integrated report of the 29 April cyclone, and listed some 15 recommendations for ima provement in cyclone mitigation. These covered warnings and the modernizing of the Dhaka warning centre, improved media communication in warning dissemination and public awareness, strengthening of the cyclone preparedness programme and decentralized decision-making, at tention to local cyclone contingency plans and revision of national standing orders, separate building codes for cyclone coastal areas and attention cyclone-resistant housing. construction of adequate permanent shelters and a range of long-term mitigation measures involving dredging of river channels, embankment construction, safer harbours, afforestation, legislation on habitation of islands, and closer consideration to environmental degradation and ecological aspects in development plan-

The report concluded: "A political commitment towards protecting coastal belt inhabitants from the severe effect of cyclonic disasters is gradually emerging. This needs to be translated in the light of the experiences gained, geared towards community level selfreliance in preparedness and adequately funded... the disaster managers can hardly rest until the people at risk become capable of living with cyclone hazards.

The writer, an International Tropical Cyclone Meorologist, is Consultant, Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, Bangkok and Course Director, Bay of Bengal workshop on Improving Cyclone Warning Response and Mitigation currently being held in Dhaka (Jan

Rebellious Georgia is Setting a Poor Example

by Daya Kishan Thussu

The violent overthrow of president Zviad Gamsakhurdia of Georgia does not augur well for

the fledgling democracies of the former Soviet Union. Gamsakhurdia was democratically

elected last year with an 87 per cent vote and refused to join the Commonwealth of

Independent States. Events in Tbilisi show that democracy may be the first casualty of the

HE overthrow of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia of Georgia shows the vulnerability of democracy and does not bode well for its future in the states formed after the break-up of the Soviet

Just last year Gamsakhurdia was the hope of the democrats across the Soviet Union when be became the first popularly elected republican president, with an 87 per cent vote.

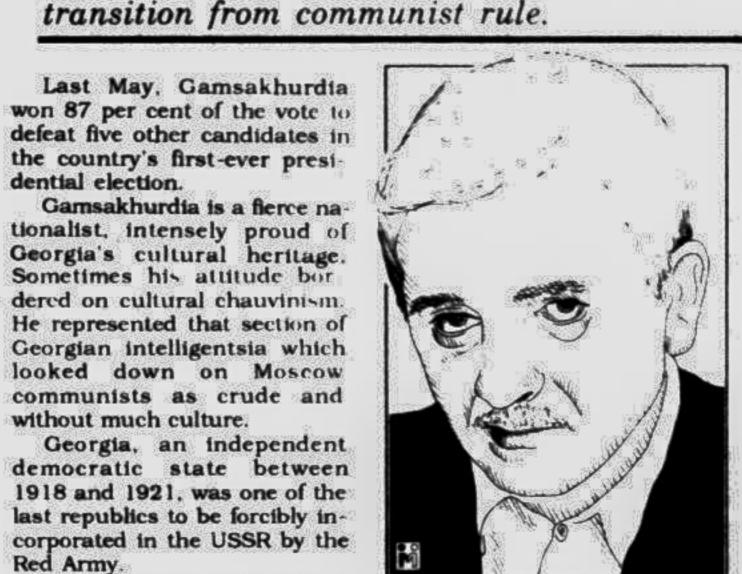
After a two-week siege, Gamsakhurdia fled to neighbouring Armenia, leaving behind 200 dead, several hundred injured and a blazing parliament and destruction in the centre of the capital.

The opposition spurned Gamsakhurdia's last-minute call for a referendum on whether he should continue in office and took the parliament

by military force. Gamsakhurdia, 52, a poet and former English literature professor, is the son of Georgia's most famous 20th Century writer, Konstantin

Gamsakhurdia. A former human rights activist. Gamsakhurdia was elected chairman of the Supreme Soviet in October 1990. Soon after he formed a non-communist government in Georgia, heading the Round

Table Free Georgia coalition. As executive president Gamsakhurdia decreed in April 1991 that Georgian bureaucrats should organise a campaign of civil disobedience against Moscow to restore "Georgia's complete defacto independence and its liberation from subordination to imperial structures."



ZVIAD GAMSAKHURDIA Fiercely nationalist

believe Many Gamsakhurdia's biggest mistake was his inability to judge the August botched coup in Moscow. During it, the president seemed to play for time and was cautious in criticising

the plotters. This attitude dismayed many supporters and precipitated divisions in his government. Crucially, it led to the defection of a section of the National Guard under Tengiz Kitovani. The lawlessness of some Kitovani's rebel guards

led to martial law and more acts of repression.

As nationalism increased many enterprising Georgians started to bypass the centralised economy and set up their own private businesses. The so-called Georgian Mafia grew as a powerful underground group.

During his seven-month rule Gamsakhurdia tried to strengthen rather than weaken state control over Georgia's economy, a move that angered the champions of the free market. Furthermore, his refusal to join 11 former Soviet republics Commonwealth Independent States was resented by Moscow.

For his part, the president called his opponents agents of Moscow, criminals and bandits who had no regard for democracy. He also alleged that the Soviet army and the mafia were helping his opponents.

When asked if the president's opponents were being armed by the mafta, Dzhaba loseliani, a member of the Georgian provisional government and leader of the "Kinghts of Georgia" para-military force, was reported to have said: "Where do you think we are going to get them The Georgian

Conservatory of Music?" A defiant Gamsakhurdia has refused to resign and his

charismatic appeal could yet

mobilise the masses, especially

in rural Georgia. That the president had popular support even after he fled was evident when thousands of supporters came out in his favour on the streets of Tbilisi, defying a military ban on demonstrations. That they were fired on was indication of the dangerous intentions of

the new Georgian leadership. What are the prospects now? Tenzig Sigua, the former and now provisional prime minister who resigned last August in protest against Gamsakhurdia's rule, has called for national "repentance

and reconciliation." The successors of Gamsakhurdia reflect many different hues in the political spectrum. The opposition grouping contains 30 parties, ranging from liberals, monarchists, and what is most worrying, admirers of the late Spanish dictator General

Franco. Monarchists are calling for a constitutional monarchy to solve the problems of a multiethnic country. The heir to the Georgian throne is a Spanish citizen. Prince Jorge

One faction wants former sovict foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze, the most fa mous Georgian after Stalin, to take power. He has dismissed suggestions that the new gov-

erning council was wrong in using force to oust a democratically elected president. He is reported to have told his critics: "It was not so much a violent takeover as a conflict between an authoritarian regime and democratic forces

which were supported by

armed formations.

It is, however, doubtful that many Georgians will accept someone so closely identified with Moscow. As chief of the Georgian communist party 1972 to from Shevardnadze arrested the nationalist and human rights activist Gamsakhurdia for dis-

The power struggle in Tbilisi could have disturbing resonances elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. In the transition from communist rule to political pluralism, democracy may be the first casualty, especially when arms are so freely available because of the collapse of central authority.

For ordinary Georgians, reeling under a financial catastrophe, the spectacle of various nationalist factions clamouring for power through crude military force is unlikely to strengthen their faith in the democratic process. + GEMINI NEWS

DAYA KISHAN THUSSU, an Indian researcher and journalist, is Associate Editor of Gemini News Service.

Local water heaters

Sir, Sometimes ago I bought one locally manufactured water heater. But only after about three months of use the bottom of the water heater started leaking. I contacted the supplier who told me that some modification will be necessary and I have to pay the cost. As winter season is on and I needed warm water I had no other alternative but to agree to suppliers' terms. The job was done in two weeks and on payment of total cost of about Tk 1000.

We do not mind using local products but they must give us reasonably good service. It appears there is no control on 'quality' of products manufac-

tured in our country and on the price. Consumers are often compelled to pay high price for poor quality products. No effort is made by manufacturers to give 'after sales service' to consumers. Complaints are often ignored.

There is one institution called Bangladesh Standard Testing Institution (BSTI) which is supposed to check the quality of products manufactured locally. It appears manufacturers just ignore this organisation as generally no seal of BSTI is seen on prod-

ucts being sold in the market. Will the Ministry of Industries, BSTI, Chamber of Commerce and Consumers' Association Bangladesh look

into this matter and see that the poor consumers of local products get proper value for the money spent by them? This is vital to increase confidence of people for local prod-

Mrs S Haq Eskaton, Dhaka.

New Market mosque

Sir, One of my teachers. Prof Dalilur Rahman was recently telling me about a problem with the mosque inside Dhaka New Market. As the staircase has no roof, the musallis face problem on the rainy days. The musallis are to

put off their shoes on the basement.

Would the relevant authority please arrange to construct a roof of the staircase compatible with the architectural design of the mosque.

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

'Change and expense'

Sir, My attention has been drawn to the letter written by Mr M Zahidul Haque published under this column of your esteemed daily of the 19th

January 1992 under the above caption. In his letter Mr Haque has expressed his opinion about changing the name of Biman's business class — the Rajonigandha class. He said that it was not necessary to change the name. But does he really know why it was changed? Here is the reason.

The flower Rajonigandha (tuberose), is used in South-East Asia in a special occasion as funerals. It is an emblem of grief in Japan and in neighbouring countries. So, when the smiling air hostesses used to greet the passenger welcoming them in side the aircraft in Rajonigandha class with a bunch of this flower the passengers quite naturally became surprised and fright-In fact, it was absolutely

Biman's failure to find out well in advance what effect this flower would have on the passengers. First of all, they did not bother to make a survey before implementing the name. However, it is a matter of prestige that finally the concerned authority has seen into the matter and changed the name accordingly.

Delwar Hossain Moddho Bashabo, Dhaka.