Dhaka, Friday, January 31, 1992

Philippines Election

Whether the Philippine president has merely rewarded an ally for his past loyalty or tried to ensure the continuance of the existing policies. the formal endorsement of Fidel V Ramos as the presidential candidate by Corazon Aquino has solved a riddle but touched off a controversy. Until last week, there was considerable uncertainty as to who will get Ms Aquino's backing -Speaker of the House Ramon Mitra or the former Defence Secretary General Ramos - and some wondered if the president would change her mind and run for the second term in the May election.

The support extended to the General by Ms Aguino should not really come as a surprise. It was a mini-military revolt engineered by Mr Ramos, then the acting armed forces Chief of Staff, against the late Ferdinand Marcos that gave an edge to the People's Power and brought Ms Aquino to power in February 1986. Since joining the new government, he has played his role, not always with much effectiveness, in putting down one military coup after another. He thus proved his allegiance to the president, for which he has now won the reward, but he failed to emerge as a hero for the strife-torn nation. Again, he is 63, not quite a dashing fast-moving, robust military leader.

It is said that the choice made by Ms Aquino has split the president's own family which has always been in the political limelight since the fall of the Marcos administration as well as the all-powerful Catholic church without whose vocal support Ms Aquino might not have made it to the presidency.

At this stage, it may not be all that simple to understand why the president took this controversial move. Rewarding an old ally must have been an important factor. At the same time, the 59-year-old president does not perhaps rate Mr Mitra all that highly, particularly for his lack of administrative experience. Last but not the least, Ms Aquino has taken due notice of the decision of Imelda Marcos to enter the race. Few would rate the chances of the former First Lady, now out on bail, as even reasonable. But, with all the money she can pump into the campaign, she can divide votes in the confused field of at least nine contenders.

What can the troubled archipelago which is yet to stand on its own feet, politically and economically, despite the well-meaning but ineffective rule by Corazon Aquino, expect from the May election? Most analysts say, very little. It may be just a case of old wine put in a new bottle. Although candidate Mr Mitra has spoken feelingly about the country's "jobless and hungry" and angrily condemned "graft and corruption", the campaign is certain to be essentially "personalityoriented", instead of being based on well-defined socio-economic issues. Again, there may be votebuying, intimidation, pressures and probably even violence. Let us hope, these fears may not come true.

There is another consideration that may well have prompted the choice of General Ramos by Ms Aquino. Having failed to win over the entire armed forces, especially the young reformminded officers who had once worked with Mr Ramos during the anti-Marcos revolt, the president may hope that it is the General, rather than Mr Mitra, who may bring stability to the armed forces and concentrate on long overdue socioeconomic changes throughout the nation. However, in order to win the race, Mr Ramos must still cross many hurdles. At this stage, his most important job is to get a running mate, one who secures the full support of the Church and, hopefully, reunites the ruling party and the president's own family against Ms Aquino's estranged cousin Eduardo Cojuangco who is now regarded as the principal candidate for the opposition This is the politics of the Philippines in its truest form.

Why Should Buses Hurtle Past Airport?

It is only a matter of days we commented on the first pile-up accident on our city roads. We marvelled on Dhaka's achieving it on a heavytraffic road - Mirpur Road near the Karotoa state guest house, that is - which is not possible in any industrialised nation. There all motorised surface traffic inside a city moves literally at a snail's pace. Our Dhaka metropolitan roads are taken by all drivers as open highways such as motorways and autobahns are. As if only to teach us a lesson, on Wednesday, there occurred an accident - not quite a ptle-up one - in which a speeding bus smashed a private car and then, in an attempt to escape, ran into half a dozen rickshaws - killing seven on the spot and injuring many, of which more are feared to die subsequently. And this happened on a real highway — near the new airport.

All bus passengers have it as a piece of common knowledge the eerie feeling that grips you as the bus literally takes a plunge into the waiting milling crowd of people and vehicles opposite the airport entrance - with, God knows why, an accelerating speed. It ploughs through that crowd, miraculously avoiding, as the bats do, contact with men and things - most of times. But there are times, such as it was on Wednesday, when the massive kind of hurtling bus stumbles on people

There is an inescapable lesson in this accident. There should be strict speed limit on stretches of our national highway network, such as the one from Mahakhali to Joydebpur Chowrasta with failsafe arrangements for enforcing that limit. Patrols are a must for this - their frequency worked out with an eye on actual effectiveness.

Besides speeding, these patrols should also check overloading and other infringements of the basics of taking a highway. We would be neglecting this urgent need only at the risk of the Wednesday horror repeating itself ad nauseum. We can hardly afford the certain erosion of our human sensibility that is sure by-product of such accidents.

The Anti Corruption Act of 1947 was tradvertently printed as "of 1974" in our report on Wednesday and editorial yesterday. The printing error is regretted.

A New Turn in Algerian Politics

LOERIA'S President Chadli Bendjedid took a A tentative step towards democracy for his country by announcing plans to end the state of siege he imposed in June last year when rioting aborted the general election due at that time. On 27th September last year, he lifted the state of siege and set the election, twice postponed previously for December 26 last year. At that time, the President seemed determined to get the elections under way. He appointed Maj-General Rarbi Belkheir, his right-hand man and a pillar of the army, as minister of the interior, with responsibility for making sure that the scheduled election should take place on its

due date. The elections were duly held last month in its first round. In the first round of voting, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) won 188 of the 231 seats decided, only 28 short of a majority. The second round of election was due to have been held for 199 seats.

The second round of voting was expected to solidify the fundamentalists' control of Parliament, making Algeria north Africa's first Islamic fundamentalist republic. It would also have been an unprecedentedly free election in an Arab country.

But the opposition fundamentalist muslims trouncing Bendjedid's ruling party in the first round of parliamentary voting seemed to have ominous implication to the armybacked government. Seeking

to stem the fundamentalist muslim tide that was on its way to taking over Parliament. the Government scrapped the second round of voting for a new national assembly just five days before the scheduled

Then another surprising development followed. President Chadli Ghadi Bendjedid unexpectedly declared that he was stepping down after 13 years as head of state. Chadli has obviously gone because of the result of the vote which precipitated a split

by ASM Nurunnabi alised opposition, introduced reforms and allowed the elec-

tion last December. Thus, Algeria's experiment with democracy seems to have failed with the military taking over, which is a virtual coup detat. The common wisdom is that the FIS is actually a response to 30 years of mismanagements, corruption, and a ruined economy that failed to meet the aspirations of the up

and coming generation of

be explained more by the people's genuine demand for democracy and resentment against military rule than an enthusiastic endorsement of fundamentalismas such.

In its first response to the scrapping of Algerian's first multiparty general elections and President Chadli Benjedid shock resignation, the FIS appealed to all Algerians, including the army," to take a stand against this giant of power". the newly installed High

mixed. One of their leading spokesmen commented, "It is a great dilemma. Either you consider fundamentalism a serious disease which must be surgically removed, or a passing phenomenon which will die a natural death if we let the FIS take some responsibilities and demonstrate their incompetence".

The ruling party was in no mood to take any chances. The spectre of Muslim fundamentalists in power brought Algeria's once dominant army back on to centre stage,

litical commentators, the scrapping of the elections and keeping out the fundamentalists by force can only have the effect of strengthening further the fundamentalist cause so far as the electorate is concerned. And fundamentalists are not too simple not to make a political capital of such blatantly repressive measure adopted by the ruling party backed by the State Security Council.

Judged by its steady growth in a large number of countries in Africa and the Middle East. fundamentalism is considered by many political scientists not as a cancer in body politic or a passing fad. It appears to be a lasting movement that flourishes in condition of poverty. And Algeria has provided a fitting breeding ground for it. If by virtue of its electoral victory, the FIS could achieve power democratically, it would have sought to make Algeria the world's fourth fundamentalist country, after Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Iran. These three countries maintain links not only to the FTS, but also to radical Islamic parties in other states, including Tunista, Mali,

Niger, and Egypt. The prospect of Islamic rule in Algeria alarmed the ruling party and the neighbours. Hênce it seems to have lost the first round of democracy and also perhaps the opportunity to demonstrate that Islam could go well with democracy since, as a cult it contributes to the promotion of justice, freedom and human

given to them. Moreover pro-

vision of post-disaster shelter

may be an opportunity to de-

velop cooperative action and

the headquarters in Quezon

City, Metro Mantla and re-

gional offices down to Barangay

(village) level have been given

specific responsibilities in the

management of this project.

These officials and social

workers are assisted by tech-

nical personnel and foremen.

Once beneficiaries have been

identified for receiving assis-

tance in the project,

Community Association for

Shelter Assistance (CASA) is

organized, composing of five

clients and their families. It is

tasked with the mobilization of

labour resources to services

the construction needs of five

shelter units. It is responsible

for the safe storage of con-

struction materials and moni-

toring their use in the project.

Before actual construction of

units, training sessions are or-

ganized at regional level. The

first session is only for social

workers to familiarize them

with the project philosophy

and train them for the task to

be performed by them in the

"social preparation period"

when they are mostly dealing

with the beneficiaries. The

second session deals with core

shelter unit construction in

which technical persons in-

cluding foremen and social

workers both participate.

During the second training

session one unit of shelter is

also built to teach the tech-

nique of its construction as

shown in Figure 6 and to en-

sure familiarization with the

unit. This unit also serves as a

demonstration house for the

whole region. Full advantage of

locally available and salvaged

materials have been taken to

reduce the cost of each unit. A

group of 5 beneficiaries first

build one unit of shelter under

the guidance and help of a

foreman; then other units are

repeated. One trained foreman

is generally responsible for

construction of 50 core shelter

units in cooperation with

beneficiaries and an area social

worker. One technical person

is responsible for one region.

Random checking of built units

ensure quality control. Apart

from the UNDP assistance the

Philippine Government also

extended this project into

other regions of the country

hot covered under this pilot

A cadre of DSWD officials at

Algerian youth. About three-Algeria's experiment with democracy seems to have failed with the military taking over, which is a virtual coup detat. The common wisdom is that the FIS is actually a response to 30 years of mismanagements, corruption, and a ruined economy that failed to meet the aspirations of the up and coming generation of

in the regime or Chadli bowing to the inevitable. After the vietory of the fundamentalists in the first round of voting. Chadli has been bombarded by conflicting demands to cancel the poll, send in the army and keep Algerian multiparty general election on track despite probable victory by a party whose leaders describe

Algerian youth.

democracy as "atheism". Chadli said in his letter of resignation that the country's present situation was "a heavy responsibility that I cannot accept". Though he tried to lead Algeria to democracy, he had to step down in the face of an Islamic fundamentalist advance to seize power in Parliament and put the nation under Sharia Law. Yet it goes to Chadli's credit that he liber-

quarters of Algeria's 25.7 mtllion people are under 30 and the unemployment rate is 23 per cent. The general run of people might have missed the fundamentalist undertone in the FIS programme calling for a ban on alcoholism, separation of the sexes at school and protecting the family", a position widely interpretated as denying jobs to women. By and large, they support the FIS as they see in it a return to justice, accountability, honesty and due process-values that were destroyed by 30 years of a socialist experiment gone bad. In fact these were the factors which accounted for the success of the FIS in the previous municipal elections. Thus the overwhelming electoral lurch to fundamentalism may

Security Council.

Foreign reaction to the developments was tempered by mixed feelings towards the prospect of an Islamic government. France, the former colonial power said it was "preoccupied" by the Algerian crisis. Its governing Socialists said, "the installation of a military regime makes the situation explosive". The US State Department also expressed concern at the "interruption" of the electoral process, Adding that "obviously we would not be particularly comfortable with an authoritarian regime that did not believe in democracy and human rights".

Within Algeria itself, the reaction among professed democrats and liberals was

forces in a dangerous game of A five-member High State Council was sworn in promptly

matching two irreconcilable

to fill the constitutional void following Bendjedid's resignation. The council is nominally headed by Mohammad Boudtaf, a hero of the independence war plucked from exile in Morocco where he has lived for three decades.

Security forces circled two main mosques in Algiers as fundamentalists held Friday prayer services for the first time since being stripped of an election victory by a virtual military coup. There were also reports of mass arrests of fundamentalist activists in Algeria. In the opinion of many po-

have faced three more ty-

phoons with winds up to 180

kph and all units have survived.

The construction cost esti-

mates for materials for the

core shelter units is about peso

4500 (\$200). Cost of walling

and roofing using indigenous

materials is assumed to be

Project Implementation

minimum requirement for a

typhoon resistant construction

must be met. Cost effective-

Corrugated roofing sheets,

This modular design incor-

porates all features of modern

housing without imposing it on

the beneficiary. There is min-

imum danger that the benefi-

clary perceives the unit to be

too good for his needs per-

suading him to give it up,

lease, or sell it in order to

generate resources to meet

other more important needs.

gutters, down spouts, etc.

It has been ensured that the

peso 800.

Shelter for Disaster Victims: A Philippine Experience

HE Philippines is subj ect to frequent disasters of a variety of types. It is vulnerable in varying degrees to hazards in the form of typhoons, floods, landslides, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, seiche, storm surges and sea level changes. Typhoons regularly affect the country. The annual average number of tropical cyclones originating from or entering into the Philippine area of responsibility is 19-22 and 5 to 9 make landfall each year causing widespread damage. Flooding often results from heavy rainfall associated with tropical cyclones. Storm surges created by tropical cyclones are another problem causing suffering in communities located in coastal areas.

The estimated worth of property and agricultural products lost and or damaged per typhoon ranges from 10 to 500 million pesos (1 US dollar = 22.2 Pesos (1987). Damages due to flooding varies from 2 to 100 million pesos. An estimate of damage occurring due typhoons between September 1970 and March 1982 indicated 3,867 lives lost. 6,206,000 people affected and property worth 681,819,000 US dollar destroyed. Figure I shows the tracks of typhoons crossing Philippine landmass from 1955 to 1985 indicating that except for some parts of Southern Mindanao, the whole country is vulnerable.

Housing Overview : The Philippines is a developing country. Rapid family formation, increasing land and construction costs, financial inability of many families to own homes are factors in the growing scarcity of housing. The housing shortage is particularly acute in urban areas. Home construction is largely a private sector activity though the government is also increasingly involved in helping people. The so called traditional housing which is most common lacks basic typhoon resistant features. Effort to rebuild the destroyed houses of disaster victims are mainly self help. supplemented by limited assistance from the government and periodic aid from the private sector as well as from international and local non-governmental organisa-

tions. The Emergency Shelter Assistance, which is part of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) package of services delivered to disaster victims, provides financial grants, not to exceed peso 500, per family with either totally or partially damaged houses.

Disaster Management

The Department of Social Welfare and Development * (DSWD) of Government of the Philippines is specifically tasked with the extension of emergency relief assistance and social services to victims of disasters to help them cope with the crisis, meet their immediate basic needs and eventually lead to their rehabilitation and a life of normalcy. During disasters the Secretary of DSWD directs the department's disaster emergency operations and coordinates DSWD's operations with the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) and heads of other agencies and groups.

Typhoon Sisang in 1987. like the other disasters in the past, rendered thousands of families homeless. Reports indicated that of the 489,119 affected families 206,078 had their houses totally destroyed necessitating either major restoration or replacement. Additionally there were the partially damaged houses that needed repairs and upgrading before they were fit to be reoccupied.

Long-standing experiences of DSWD in disaster relief operations show that the majority of the people are victimized by damage due to structurally inadequate shelters. Another reason is that these houses are usually located in risk areas like the shoreline. The DSWD's existing Emergency Shelter Assistance (ESA) is not sufficient to meet the housing needs of disaster victims due to budgetary constraints. Consequently families even with ESA remain vulnerable and perennial target beneficia-

ries for housing assistance. Core Shelter Assistance Project: The immediate objective of the project was to provide assistance for the construction of typhoon-resistance shelter thus also enabling the DSWD to use cost effectively the external assistance re-

ceived for the rehabilitation of

by Dr Satyendra P Gupta

Typhoon Sisang victims. The long range goal was to upgrade the emergency shelter assistance of the DSWD.

The DSWD developed a core shelter unit for the ty phoon victims with the help of a local engineer under the overall guidance of the senior research scientist of ADPC. A consultative meeting was ar ranged between officials of DSWD, the engineer and the senior research scientist of Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre at DSWD Office, Quezon, City. The plan of the Core Shelter Unit was thoroughly evaluated and several suggestions were made by ADI'C's senior research scientist for incorporating them

number of units in so as to cover more beneficiaries.

UNDP Project Assistance : The government of the Philippines attaches high priority to the Core Shelter Assistance project which is being piloted in the three regions most regularly struck by typhoons. The result of the pilot implementations will serve as a basis for upgrading of the existing emergency shelter assistance of the DSWD on a national scale. UNDP technical assistance has been south to facilitate the identification of the most suitable technology transfer process. Apart from various types of assistance south under this project. DSWD specifically requested

ness is achieved by providing for roofing, walling and flooring materials, made of indigenous and cheap materials. To accommodate gradual subsequent shelter upgrading the design involves self contained modules as follows : A) Provision of a core shelter unit consisting of foundation, wood post and framing, roof raming and trusses, gravel fill for totlet and flooring with indigenous local materials, roofing, sidings, door and windows. B) Upgrading and improvement through provision of Cement Hollow Block (CHB) walls and concrete slabs for mainfloor and toilet. C) Upgrading through provision of door and window panels and interior finishings. D) Upgrading through provision of Gi

Locally available material "Nipa" being used by beneficiary for roof covering immediately after core construction.

into the drawings to make it typhoon resistant and structurally sound. The drawings were finalized through further informal consultations between DSWD and ADPC and implementation started during 1988. These units were designed to withstand 180 km

per hour winds. Initially 450 units were constructed during 1988 on a trial basis and these units were subjected to two typhoons with wind velocities reaching 160 and 175 km per hour. All shelters withstood the typhoon winds giving DSWD encouragement and confidence in the performance of the shelters. It was decided to increase the

UNDP provide an international consultant to advice on planning, refining and interpreting the physical design as well as transfer skills through training and demonstration to the DSWD personnel, foremen and beneficiaries. Under this pilot scheme 5,613 typhoon resistant core shelter units in the 15 provinces and 4 cities are to be constructed.

The DSWD also expressed a desire to make use of the technical expertise of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre in this work because of its past experience in the development of the core shelter.

It is heartening to report that these core shelter units

On the other hand motivated by an improved perception of the importance of housing the beneficiary has the technology that will permit him to sequence the upgrading of the units. This features enhance the cost-effective delivery of shelter technology to low income groups. The direct beneficiary of the project have to meet the following requirements: i) Their monthly income should be below the urban food threshold of Peso 1,441 for a family of six or the rural threshold of Peso 1,221. ii) Their hoses have to be either completely missing or destroyed and their limited resources have prevented them

shelter assistance from any English version on the other agency. tv) They should have a guarantee of ownership or permanent or long term occupancy of the lot where the shelter will be built. **Beneficiary Participation**

from reconstructing their

damaged shelter, iii) They

should not be recipients of

An issue that has been ad-

dressed in this project is beneficiary participation in needs assessment, in identification of existing resources and of capabilities. The social component can never be ignored in the provision of any assistance. . Beneficiary participation ensures that the type of shelter provided is exactly what the beneficiaries wants and their needs are not exaggerated. It also guarantees the building up human capabilities which if ignored will give rise to dependence. Deficiencies in beneficlary involvement in the project can also have adverse consequences on the long term ability of the beneficiaries to value and safeguard the houses

scheme using its own re-Conclusion: Disasters cannot be always prevented but their effects can certainly be mitigated. Experience with natural disasters has time and again proved that most lives are lost by destruction due to inadequate shelters. If the

structures are built appropri-

ately to withstand the forces

created by a disaster the dam-

ages could be minimized.

The core shelter project in the Philippines is an example of cooperation for mitigating the effects of typhoons. The poorest of the poor in the country are being benefited by this project and it must be recognised that it is they who always suffer the most in disas-

Disaster-prone countries in the Asian-Pacific region may learn from this Philippine experience.

The writer is Senior Research Scientist, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, Asian Institute of Technology. Bangkak.

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.

Retirement age

Sir, My attention was drawn to a letter on the above subject by Rasul Nizam in your January 21 issue. While I agree with him that we have a dearth of able and efficient officers in this country and that the retired officers belonging to the erstwhile CSP, PFS and so on did recejive good training, I cannot agree with his suggestion to treat each retirement case on merit because he has failed to take into account the stark realities of our socioeconomic conditions and see the issue from a broader perspective. I doubt, if any other

country has a more severe unemployment situation than One who cares. we have. And very few will have the kind of severe resource constraints that we have. Knowing the socio-cultural situation here, any decision to treat each individual case on merit would only open the door for nepotism, favouritism and corruption rather than a true evaluation. Besides, it is really not necessary; the country will not miss a bit nor suffer a bit if officers continue to get retired on attaining 57 years of age or even earlier. The problem is elsewhere. It is a critical shortage of people of integrity and dedication in

most organised sectors including government service, rather than a dearth of able and efficient persons. The senior officers who have retired or will retire in near future should be prepared to serve the country in some other capacity (e.g. consultants) rather than hanging on to their positions of privilege and power.

SSC/HSC certificates

Sir, It is gathered that the students are facing a great problem to get English transcript of their original Bangla SSC/HSC marksheets and certificates from the respective Education Boards. The existing process is a lengthy and timekilling one. We would suggest the authorities of all the four Boards to arrange to issue SSC/HSC certificates in Bangla on one side of the paper with

College, Dhaka.

I think justice will be met if debt relief is given to all the debtors of the HBFC whether he/she is a defaulter or not. Otherwise, number of honest people will diminish further in this country. .

M Saleem Ullah

M. Zahidul Haque, Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural

Honesty

Sir, "Honesty is not the best policy," said a borrower of HBFC when he came to know that the government was contemplating to waive a portion of the loan given to the industrialists, and defaulting HBFC debtors

Mottheel C/A, Dhaka.