

A New Turn in Algerian Politics

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 Corason 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 Aquino 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 lack 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 Corason 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 "personality-oriented", instead of being based on well-defined socio-economic issues. Again, there may be vote-buying, 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 reform-minded 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 socio-economic 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 heavy-traffic 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 pile-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 and vehicles.

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 fall-safe 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 inadvertently printed as of 1974 in our report on Wednesday and editorial yesterday. The printing error is regretted.

ALGERIA'S President Chadli Bendjedid took 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 Rabi 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 unprecedented 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 implications to the army-backed 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 date.

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

in the regime or Chadli bowing to the inevitable. After the victory 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 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-

alised opposition, introduced reforms and allowed the election last December.

Thus, Algeria's experiment with democracy seems to have failed with the military taking over, which is a virtual coup d'etat. 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 Algerian youth. About three-

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Shelter for Disaster Victims: A Philippine Experience

by Dr Satyendra P Gupta

THE Philippines is subject 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 to 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 1 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 organisations.

number of units in so as to cover more beneficiaries.

UNDP Project Assistance: 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 sought to facilitate the identification of the most suitable technology transfer process. Apart from various types of assistance south under this project, DSWD specifically requested

The DSWD developed a core shelter unit for the typhoon victims with the help of a local engineer under the overall guidance of the senior research scientist of ADPC. A consultative meeting was arranged 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 ADPC's senior research scientist for incorporating them



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

have faced three more typhoons with winds up to 180 kph and all units have survived. The construction cost estimates for materials for the core shelter units is about peso 4500 (\$200). Cost of walling and roofing using indigenous materials is assumed to be peso 800.

Project Implementation
It has been ensured that the minimum requirement for a typhoon resistant construction must be met. Cost effectiveness 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 rafter and trusses, gravel fill for toilet and flooring with indigenous local materials, roofing, sittings, door and windows. B) Upgrading and improvement through provision of Cement Hollow Block (CHB) walls and concrete slabs for main floor and toilet. C) Upgrading through provision of door and window panels and interior finishings. D) Upgrading through provision of Corrugated roofing sheets, gutters, down spouts, etc.

This modular design incorporates all features of modern housing without imposing it on the beneficiary. There is minimum danger that the beneficiary perceives the unit to be too good for his needs persuading him to give it up, lease, or sell it in order to generate resources to meet other more important needs. 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: 1) 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. 2) Their houses have to be either completely missing or destroyed and their limited resources have prevented them from reconstructing their damaged shelter. 3) They should not be recipients of shelter assistance from any agency. 4) They should have a guarantee of ownership or permanent or long term occupancy of the lot where the shelter will be built.

Beneficiary Participation
An issue that has been addressed in this project is beneficiary participation in needs assessment, identification of existing resources and 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 want and their needs are not exaggerated. It also guarantees the building up human capabilities which if ignored will give rise to dependence. Deficiencies in beneficiary involvement in the project can also have adverse consequences on the long term ability of the beneficiaries to value and safeguard the houses

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 appropriately to withstand the forces created by a disaster the damages 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 disasters.

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, Bangkok.

To the Editor...

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, PPS and so on did receive 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 socio-economic conditions and see the issue from a broader perspective. I doubt, if any other

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.

One who cares.

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 time-killing 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

English version on the other side.

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

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.

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 Motijheel C/A, Dhaka.