

Upsurge in Thailand

The brutal crackdown by the Thai army on the pro-democracy protesters in Bangkok, resulting in several deaths, has proved once again that when threatened by a mass upsurge, a military junta can go completely mad and behave very much like an occupation force.

The army has used different excuses for adopting its ruthless approach, even going to the extent of "setting up mobile death squads to hunt down and kill rioters," as an international agency report from Bangkok puts it.

No one would be surprised if a new compromise is worked out, with the democratic system given another short lease of life. Such an adhoc accord will only mean pushing contradictions in the Thai political system to the background, putting all the inherent causes of conflict under the carpet.

Seen from this perspective, the only solution of the crisis lies in the army completely withdrawing from politics and handing over its power to a democratically elected civilian government. There is really no third choice.

Becoming Global Villagers

Nothing illustrates more dramatically the coming together of countries and peoples than the instant flow of news and images that has now become an everyday reality for most countries, including Bangladesh — for us though in a limited sense.

Granted at present the benefit of the government's move will be confined to the rich and the powerful, however, this beginning will set in motion a process which will definitely have a far wider impact in opening our hearts and minds to what is happening in the world at large.

For a country like Bangladesh this link with the world is all the more important because we need to expose ourselves to as many new ideas and innovations as we can. This new link will be confined only to the elites, at the outset, still the impact of this exposure for our elites should not be underestimated.

However, we must remember that technology — both old and new — is never an un-mixed blessing. It all depends on our ability to put it to the best use for us. This will also be true for the new technological marvel that will soon become available here — first for a few, but hopefully not too long in the future, for many more.

In a Unipolar World, Developing Countries Need Unity and a Stronger United Nations

by A S M Mustafizur Rahman

THE far-reaching changes which we have witnessed in recent past calls for a reappraisal of our thoughts and actions. It is also proved that cooperation rather than confrontation, dialogue instead of distrust are needs of today.

which is based on independence of judgement and objective evaluation of international developments. At this important confluence of time and history it is all the more necessary to further strengthen the vigilant role of our Movement with a view to protecting the sovereignty, political independence and economic freedom of the developing countries.

dom and social emancipation and establishment of a just and equitable economic relations. It is equally clear that issues of global concern can only be resolved through the unique multilateral framework of the UN. Since two-thirds of the UN membership are Non-Aligned countries, it is only natural that we should make every effort to strengthen the role of the UN.

THE ECONOMIC SCENE IN BANGLADESH — III

Much Work Awaits the Administration in All Areas, from Expansion of Rural Credit to Export Drive

by A K N Ahmed

This is the last article of the three-part series, written by a former Governor of Bangladesh Bank.

PRIORITY attention should be given to research and development on increasing per acreage output of foodgrains and reducing the cost of production of shortage agricultural products. We do not have many research institutions to undertake such programme.

ing flowers and orchids to Japan which again imports sweet gourds and sweet potatoes from Mexico. There is no reason why Bangladesh should not be able to export those vegetables to Japan with little home work on quality control and standardisation.

control of deposit rates and interest on loans have almost been done away with in order to generate competition. Even though this has been a welcome step the intended results will not be forthcoming because of informal cartelisation of rates by banks.

risk that the company's true financial state is not what it appears to be. It is on the basis of auditor's certificates that depositors and investors place their fund with financial institutions. The crucial question in devising a more effective regulatory structure in this respect is how to ensure that the auditor's incentives are aligned with those whom the audit is designed to serve and not with those who pay their fees.

While suggesting the above remedial measures I am fully aware that it is not easy to implement technocratic solutions in a democratic regime because the requirements of technocratic and democratic decision making are different. The most important requirement of an expert's decision is that it is correct.

The clash between democratic and technocratic methods and priorities is thus not just a matter of style. It goes to the basic question of self government. Too little attention to particular interests is incompatible with democracy as too much is incompatible with technocracy.

ENLARGEMENT OF IRDP AND GRAMEEN BANK ACTIVITIES : It is also necessary to enlarge IRDP and Grameen Bank activity list and involve the bankers as well as local officials with the matching of activities and intended beneficiaries and improving the marketing arrangements through supplies of designers, standards and raw materials and the collection, transport, storage and sale of finished products with a view to ensure that a large share of the final value goes to the beneficiaries.

LINKING OF EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT : Linking of education and employment and provision of more vocational training is another area which should be attended to in order to stop wastage of massive resources on university education producing only dumb graduates without any marketing skill. Such exercise in futility should come to a stop.

EXPORT DRIVE : Considerable work needs to be done to increase our exports. Our share in world's total exports being very small we will not face difficulties from importing countries to penetrate into their markets. Even though recently some progress has been made in export of readymade garments yet even in respect of this item much more can be done.

FINANCIAL STRUCTURE REFORMS : Lastly, a few comments on financial structure reform. Such reforms, including complete overhaul of Bangladesh Bank, should enjoy high priority in the Government's agenda.

There are two more important areas where actions need to be taken to make financial reforms meaningful. They are regulation and audit. Some are in the habit of thinking that deregulation and privatisation are the magic solutions of all problems and these measures alone will bring about laissez faire paradise on earth. This has never been. This will never be.

Another area where attention should be focussed is auditing the statements of accounts of financial institutions. It is high time that the obligations of auditors be clarified by the Government. There is increasing suspicion about the effectiveness of self regulation in this field.

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.

Election expenditure and democracy

Sir, May I refer to the off and on pronouncements of the political leaders of the country on institutionalisation of democracy. In this context question arises as to how democracy can be institutionalised without imparting at least universal primary education to the people.

factor which has perhaps the greatest bearing on the institutionalisation of democracy is the election cost incurred by the candidates. It was reported in the newspapers that many candidates in last parliamentary elections incurred massive expenses sometimes running into say Taka 20 lacs though the election rules provided that the election expenditure of a candidate could not exceed Taka three lacs.

WASA project at Senpara Parbata

Sir, The Greater Dhaka Sewerage Project which passes through Mouza Senpara Parbata has created tremendous frustration in the locality. Instead of digging the existing canal with its Khas lands on both the sides, the whole project has been diverted to the northern side of the canal affecting valuable lands of private owners.

Loud-speakers

Sir, The indiscriminate use of loud-speakers on various occasions, be it a wedding ceremony or a birthday party, has become a fashion today. We however don't know who first got this idea of using loud-speakers on such occasions. But this 'nuisance' sometimes makes our lives miserable. The playing of some records of film songs, usually in low taste, at a high pitch is so nerve-racking.

'President's Award'

Sir, Thanks to Mr A Qaiyum of Gulshan, Dhaka for his brief but very pertinent and significant letter on the above subject (May 16). In fact, he has echoed my feeling as well. In this connection, I shall recall my letter in your column entitled 'Order of precedence' appearing sometimes in April. It has been rather sadly observed that the Head of the State is being reduced to nothing. I consider it as a usurpation of the highest dignity of his unique office.

Law of blasphemy

Sir, Perhaps in every democratic and civilized country of the world there is a law governing the act of blasphemy or to protect religious people from the onslaught of so called ultra progressive forces against religion. We appeal to the members of parliament to pass a law of blasphemy in order to safeguard the freedom of religious thought in our country.

The users never mind disturbing the studies of the students and the neighbour's peace at night. Through your esteemed column, may I draw the attention of the law enforcing authorities to put necessary restrictions on its random use and stop its growing tyranny.

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