Dhaka, Tuesday, June 9, 1992

Uncertainties in Manila

Fidel Ramos may be breathing more comfortably than before as all the signs point towards his victory in what has been the most confused and unpredictable presidential election in the post-Second World War history in the Philippines. The latest count shows that Ramos had just over two million votes or nearly 25 per cent of popular votes, considerably ahead of those two of his closest rivals, Miriam Defensor Santiago, the populist corruption-buster and Eduardo Cojuangco, a former associate of the late Ferdinand Marcos. Despite this lead, Ramos, a former Defence Minister and the candidate endorsed by outgoing President Corazon Aquino, cannot yet take his victory for granted.

The immediate concern in Manila centres on possible game plans of the two rivals of Ramos to challenge the final outcome of the polls, which won't be known for a few more weeks. Having given up her fast-until-death, challenging the alleged vote rigging at the polls. Santiago is said to have launched a private campaign of her own to gain international attention, especially from the United States, in the hope that a fresh polls would become a global demand. This is, of course, a highly unlikely possibility. In the pursuit of this plan, the candidate has even addressed a private letter, now leaked to a regional weekly, to President George Bush to use his influence in setting things right in the Philippines polls, although it is hardly clear what the US leader can do to help in the domestic politics of a sovereign nation.

The strategy that Cojuangco may follow to destabilise the situation causes much greater concern to Filipinos than the somewhat naive moves by Santiago. Many observers believe that the former ally of Marcos, who commands a powerful organisational machine as well as almost limitless funds, is capable of launching a military-style operation against the winner Ramos, perhaps with the active support of a section of the army. After all, having put down several coups during the Aquino presidency, the former Defence Minister is anything but a hero to the so-called rebels — young, ambitious and restless — inside the armed forces.

Last but not the least, it seems that whoever emerges as the final victor — let us assume, it is Ramos — would win the race with only a maximum of 30 per cent popular votes, thus lacking the mandate that his predecessors enjoyed. To what extent he will work well with an opposition-dominated Congress remains to be seen.

The Philippines thus faces a difficult time in moving along the road to stability and progress. It is proved once again that the key to a democratic future in a developing country, especially one which had been under authoritarianism for a decade, does not lie merely in holding free and fair elections. It is obvious in the archipelago, as it is in Thailand, that unless political parties are reorganised at the grassroots level, with welldefined socio-economic programmes, the urbanised groupings, some enjoying army backing or enormous funding support, if not both, will not be able to change the overall scenario. The frustration that Filipinos and their friends abroad feel about the situation stems from the country's failure to cope with challenges inherent in the transition from dictatorship to democracy. One only hopes that the transition will not be unduly prolonged, and will not cause any bloodshed, in the Philippines, a resource-rich country that should one day rank among most prosperous countries in the region.

Crime under Cover

At the end of the football season, a round of congratulations or two is due to the victorious team. Abahani Krira Chakra deserve commendation for a splendid triumph against arch-rivals Mohammedan Sporting at Mirpur. Unfortunately, the satisfaction of seeing the 1992 season end in a flourish of good, competitive football vanished with the news of some inexplicable, gruesome pieces of thuggery following the match.

According to reports in the press, one person was stabbed to death and nearly 50 were slashed with cut-throat razors and knives. Virtually all the injured were spectators at the match, who were attacked by unidentified thugs as they came out of the ground. Eye-witnesses also reported that a number of thugs stood at exit gates, pointing their lethal weapons forward and slashing people indiscriminately. Many people also had their pockets and trousers ripped open and wallets lifted by the gangs as the crowd tried to squeeze through the narrow exit point en masse.

Two facts emerged from this orgy of slashing and pick-pocketing. One was the total lack of police protection for the thousands of football lovers who had gone to Mirpur for no other reason than to cheer their team in their quest for the league title. The other was the almost pre-planned and organised manner in which the wave of criminal actions were perpetrated, making one of the city's major suburbs into a criminals' paradise for a brief period of time. Both the facts are alarming to the extreme and call for an immediate investigation followed by drawing up of a contingency plan for the future.

It is no secret that matches between Abahani and Mohammedans always attract huge crowd, presenting a tempting target for criminals, who often mingle with spectators disguised as fans. Tempers often flare between supporters of these two traditional and bitter rivals and the resulting chaos then provides the criminal elements with a perfect "cover" for their activities. It is also alleged that the actions are carried out by criminal gangs of the locality who should be well-known to the local police.

Given these known facts, it is baffling as to why the police did not take any pre-emptive measures, such as deployment of extra men inside and outside the ground, particularly at the exits. Furthermore, it is clear that the police did not put known local criminals under observation, never mind arrest, prior to the match. Such serious lapses from people entrusted with protecting the public's lives and property are matters of grave concern, and the Ministry of Home Affairs should look into this without any delay.

UTILISING WATER RESOURCES

Barrage Component — a Lapse in Jamuna Bridge Study

Engineering Contingency Special Bridge Length

Contingency

HE river Jamuna upto

its confluence with the

Ganges at Goalunda di-

vides Bangladesh into East and

West regions. Jamuna Bridge is

a Long cherished dream of the

people of Bangladesh specially

those living in the West region.

During the last Jatiyo Sangsad

election all the major political

parties included the construc-

tion of the Jamuna Bridge in

their election manifesto and

we hope the dream of the

was taken up seriously after

independence in 1971. In

1972, with Japanese assis-

tance, the feasibility study was

taken up by Japan Internatio-

nal Co-operation Agency which

submitted its report in 1976.

After a period of long lapse the

government in 1983 establi-

shed the Jamuna Multipurpose

Bridge Authority. The study of

the bridge commenced in

1986. Rendel/Palmer and

Triton, Netherlands Enginee-

ring Consultants and Banga

desh Consultants Limited

(RPT-NEDECI-BCL) were co-

mmissioned to carry out the

Phase-I study on request by

the UNDP with World Bank

acting as the Executing Agen-

cy. The Phase-I study recom-

mended the present bridge

site, bridge approaches, asso-

length and general characte-

ristic of the bridge, gas

pipeline, electrical power co-

communication etc.

nnection, road and rail

founding Phase-II study was

also given to the same joint

venture of RPT-NEDECO-BCL

ommended that the bridge

should be designed to: Carry

four lanes of road traffic; high

voltage inter connector across

the river with potential capac

ity to carry a third inter-con-

nector; carry a gas pipeline;

carry tele-communication

links; have potential to carry

The total financial cost

189.40 700.78

94 23 348 65

35.94 132.98

47.50 175.75

estimate is US\$ 443.4 million

or Tk. 1,640 crores (\$1=Tk.

37) with breakup as follows:

MG rail in future.

Road and Rail Bridge

& Approach Viaduct

River Training words

Road Approaches

Rail Approaches

in May 1987. The study rec-

Under continued UNDP

ciated river training works

The study of Jamuna Bridge

people will come true soon.

7.00 62.90 443.40 1640.58

Bangladesh is a country of 115 million people in a land arca of 1,40,000 sq km and the population is increasing at the rate of 2.2% per year. If it goes on increasing at this rate the population will be about 140 million by year 2,000 and will be doubled by the early 21st century. Bangladesh is deficit in food and is to import to the tune of 1.5 million tons a year. It will go on increasing if we fail to utilise our expertise and resources. The only natural resources are its vast population and water. So for planning any major project in Bangladesh the planners must keep in view the utilization of these two natural resources.

Water Resource

Bangladesh is a deltate land created by the activities of three major river systems the Brahmaputra, the Ganges and the Mcghna. The combined flood flow is of the order of 190,000 m3/s of which the flow of Brahmaputra alone is 95,000m³/s. The average annual runoff of the three rivers 0 the order of 1053.5x109m3 of which the Jamuna alone contributes 618x19 or about 59%. In absence of any control structures on these rivers the entire flow is almost wasted and emptied to the Bay of Bengal.

The global fresh water resources is very meagre. Two-third of our earth is composed of water of which the share of fresh water is only 2.65%. Out of this 2.65%, only 0.45% is available as lake or river flow and the remaining are frozen in the Arctic and Antarctic region. So one can imagine how scarce is the fresh water on a global perspective.

Bangladesh is a flood prone country because of its geo-

Close links with Southeast Asia

with the historic aims of the

corruption permeates the

whole of society: "The actions

of parliament and the judiciary

go against the interests of the

nation and impede national re-

construction and develop-

He closed down Parliament,

fired 13 of the 23 supreme

court judges and all members

of the Constitutional Tribunal

and the National Judiciary

the true essence of the crisis,

one must go beyond the obvi-

ous and immediate conflict be-

tween government and

Congress. This is only a mani-

But in order to understand

Council.

He has said that chaos and

by M R Choudhury

graphical setting. Flood is an annual feature and sometimes catastrophic. Agriculture is dependent on the vagary of nature. Monsoon crops are very vulnerable to flood. Winter irrigation is very limited in absence of any control on the major rivers. The flood control process is very uncertain and dependent on the co-operation of the neighbouring countries. The two main natural resources viz. population and water, are wasted unutilized. As such any major project to improve the socio-economic condition of the people must aim at the proper utilization of these two natural resources.

LAPSE IN STUDY: But nowhere in Phase-II or Phase-II of the study consideration was given to construction of a bridge-cum-barrage. A barrage on the Brahmaputra/Jamuna river is more vital for the utilization of the water resource of the Brahmaputra/Jamuna river for the development of agriculture to feed the teeming millions of Bangladesh, to improve their socio-economic condition, to protect the envi ronment and to save the country from desertification.

The total low water flow of the Ganges is diverted by the Farakka Barrage in West Bengal and the condition of the Ganges river downstream of the barrage is deteriorating very fast. The recorded low water discharge of the Ganges at Hardinge Bridge before withdrawal by Farakka Barrage was around 41,000 cusecs. This year the discharge at Hardinge Bridge has gone down to as low as 13,500 cusces. If this situation continues unabated our Ganges Kobadak Project will be in jeopardy. Bangladesh must think of alternative sources to replenish the low flow of the Ganges from other surface water resources available within the country.

The river Jamuna has not yet reached a stable stage. Our experience with 1st East West Inter Connector and Meghna Bridge on Dhaka-Chittagong highway has shown that massive structure like these may change river morphology. But construction of bridge-cumbarrage does not create such a dangerous probability. A bridge-cum-barrage will make the river stable which will save crores of taka in terms of bank protection and river training works.

The best, cheapest and easiest way to utilise the vast water resource of Brahmaputra is to add a barrage component to the Jamuna Bridge Project. The barrage alone is a vast task, but if combined with the Jamuna Bridge, the objective can well be achieved.

Advantage of Barrage

The inclusion of the Barrage Component with the Jamuna Bridge will accrue the following additional benefits:

This will help resuscitate moribund tributaries and distributaries like Dharla. Dudkamar, Teesta, Old Bahmaputra. This will make irrigation water available to about five million hectares of land on both banks in north western, north central and north eastern regions comprising the districts of Rangpur, Bogra, Rajshahi, Pabna, Dinajpur, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Tangail, Jamalpur and Sylhet.

The on-going Teesta Project is only for supplemental irrigation. A barrage on the Jamuna will make it possible partly to supply irrigation water during dry season also.

The barrage will save full or

part of Tk 348.65 crore needed for river training and bank protection works. Once the gas pipeline is carried, separate power project may be taken up on the west bank instead of transferring through a third interconnector form east bank.

River water normally contributes to the groundwater during high stage but at low stage of the river during dry season, ground water contributes to the river flow through regeneration. With drawal of large volume of groundwater during dry season without suitable arrangement for its replenishment simultaneously, will suck the water from river bed making the river completely dry. The above process will expedite desertification and creeping up of salinity. A barrage on the Jamuna river will maintain a pool of water upstream and will keep the ground water level high.

The pool of water above the barrage will improve the environment, protect the natural vegetation, help the development of agriculture and fisheries ultimately leading to
improvement of overall socioeconomic condition of the
people.

Low water flow of the Ganges has come down to as low as 13,500 cusees. If Bangladesh is to survive and to save the existing Ganges Kobadak Project, it must go for inter basin water-transfer within the country. A barrage on the Jamuna can be the first step towards this objective.

EXPERTS VIEW: Mr B M

Abbas AT an eminent water resources expert of Bangladesh,
in a speech at a rotary club
meet on May 12 last has
stressed the need for storage
of water in the monsoon for
utilisation in the dry season.
He said that the future of millions of people rests on the
long-term optimum development of water resource of the
river basins. Dwelling at length
on the adverse effect of up-

Mr Abbas AT said Bangladesh must take effective steps to offset the increasing damage by constructing barrage on the major rivers within the country. He strongly pleaded for the execution of the Ganges Barrage for which studies had been completed in the Sixties by American consultants TAMS, site was selected and soil investigation was done. This must be implemented on a top priority basis to save the Ganges-Kobadak Project.

stream withdrawal unflaterally,

Conclusion

Bangladesh is a country with only one problem - lack of management. Those who preach that the main reason for our present condition is non-existence of natural resources, are not very correct. Vast population and huge volume of fresh water flow (wasted to the sea during winter) are our major resources which if utilised properly will be able to change the facade this country. But we fail to achieve this because of our shortsightedness. In almost every sphere of planning, long term perspective is hidden under the adhoc stop gap arrangement to manage the present contingency.

To feed the ever-increasing millions of mouths in Bangladesh, increasing food production through utilisation of vast water resources is a must and should be the prime objective of any development planning. It may be worthwhile to say that the politics of Bangladesh is dependent on the price of rice. We may look back to 1975. Still there is time to rethink about the inclusion of Barrage component in the Jamuna bridge. Once the Jamuna Bridge is constructed, a country like Bangladesh cannot think of another Barrage on the Jamuna river in 100 years time. This will be too late.

It may be pointed out that
the Farakka Barrage on the
Ganges river in West Bengal is
a barrage-cum-road and railway
bridge. For Jamuna Bridge also
we must give top priority to
Barrage component. Of all the
necessities of life food comes

The author is a water resources engineer with over 35 years of experience in Bangadesh and abroad.

The Real Losers in the Peru Crisis: the Poor

Luis Tricot writes from Santiago

President Fujimori has announced a programme to restore democracy to Peru beginning

with a plebiscite in July and the re-opening of parliament next April. The feasibility of the

plan is being doubted. Whatever happens, the real winners of Fujimori's political gamble

P RESIDENT Alberto Fujimori's self-staged
coup d'etat in Peru has
surprised the world. Not only
because of the unexpected way
he decided to solve his
country's deep social crisis,
but because it demonstrates
the enormous fragility of Latin

After decades of right-wing dictatorial rule, the countries of South America have begun to move slowly towards building a democratic system. The process of transition from military to civilian rule is peculiar, however, for the armed forces have generally beenleft untouched and still command substantial power. They know it and they use it whenever they feel it is necessary.

They used it last year in Haiti, ousting Jean Bertrand Ariste from his position as the first democratically elected president after the collapse of the Duvalier dynasty. Now they have used it in Peru, in response to a call from the President.

Some analysts suggest that because the army was merely following orders, without wanting to take over power, a return to the past is unlikely, but this is the same move made in 1973 by president Jose Maria Bordaberry of Uruguay. Then, the military stayed in power until 1984, becoming one of the most repressive and brutal regimes in the area.

Fujimori's discourse is remarkably similar to that of the military: a mixture of nationalist and moralistic rhetoric that seeks to identify his "crusade" festation of the crisis and not — as most observers seem to believe — the root cause of the problem.

will be the armed forces. The losers will be the poor.

Peru's crisis is a structural one. It has to do with the successive governments' incapacity to solve the country's socio-economic and political problems. There is an endemic dependency on foreign capital, a huge external debt, and an annual inflation rate that reached the 7,000 per cent mark only two years ago.

Extreme poverty means millions of Peruvians — especially the indigenous population — are excluded from domestic production and consumption markets.

The crisis is also linked to the bureaucratic and corrupt institutional system, with growing state violence as well as the political violence of Sendero Luminoso and other revolutionary organisations.

Alberto Fujimori tried to implement his government's neoliberal economic model, which is no different from the model proposed by the defeated right-wing presidential candidate Mario Vargas Llosa. None of the main political parties—including former president Alan Garcia's APRA party—question the neo-liberal pro-

ject. Rather, they differ on the methods to be used to implement it.

Another crucial factor has to be considered: the international dimension. The coup in Peru takes place in a totally different context from the Sixties and Seventies, when military coups swept through Latin America. Then, the ideological and political justification was the fight against Communism and Soviet Expansion. It was part of the East-West confrontation.

With the collapse of socialism and the almost unchallenged rule of capitalism around the world, Peru's case now acquires a distinct meaning.

After the Gulf War, the United States emerged as the world's most important military power. However, in the economic sphere, both the European Community and Japan and its allies are chal-

From the beginning of his mandate Fujimori, who is of Japanese descent, established close links with Japan, Singapore, South Korea and other Association of South East Asian (ASEAN) nations which, he stated, were "models of development to be imitated."

This is why Washington,

which at first condemned the coup, quickly changed its mind and recognised "the legitimacy of the constitutional president." This was sheer pragmatism because, after all, Japan had already recognised Fujimori and, vital for his survival, it had not stopped its economic aid or investment projects.

The International Monetary
Fund adopted the same position and continued supporting
the Peruvian President's economic policies.

So long as Fujimori manages to convince foreign investors that Peru is a safe country with an open economy and a huge potential market, he will not worry about his Latin American neighbours. Argentina condemned the coup, Brazil suspended all economic aid, and Venezuela cut off diplomatic relations.

Yet the Organisation of American States (OAS) only "deplored the coup," not condemning it or calling for economic or diplomatic sanctions. It was influenced, presumably, by the failure of the economic blockade imposed on Haiti. At a conference in Santiago last year, the OAS pledged itself to the defence of democracy, but it has done little so far. It is,

is corrupted. So, we could not

change our pitiable condition

even after more than two

decades of achieving freedom

In fact this vice has prolifer-

ated after liberation. Though at

present it is 'less' than what it

had been during the former

regime, can we deny its exis-

tence anywhere in Bangl

adesh? Who does not know

and feel the disgrace that links

the recent BCCI, BCI, NCL or

If we are not made corrup-

tion-free even now, Ra-

bindranath's 'Sonar Bangla' will

medical written test affairs?

however, trying to play a mediating role in the Peruvian crisis.

Fujimori has already announced the political itinerary that would eventually lead to the restoration of democracy in Peru: it begins on July 5 with the holding of a plebiscite and finishes on April 5 next year with the re-opening of Parliament.

Political analysts are sceptical of the feasibility of such a plan. In only 12 months, Fujimori will have to eradicate poverty and modernise the economy, transform the bureaucratic state into a modern and technocratic one, put an end to political violence, and finish off the massive, growing drug trafficking problem.

This is clearly an impossible task for any government, let alone one that faces increasing political opposition and diminishing (though still substantial) popular support.

Maximo San Roman, first vice-president of the republic, was sworn in as the country's constitutional president by the now "illegal" parliament. He is the legal president, but Fujimori is still the real one, because Fujimori has the support of he army.

Whatever happens, one thing is certain: the armed forces will be the real winners of Fujimori's political gamble. And the losers will be Peru's poor, because little has changed in Latin America. — GEMINI NEWS

LUIS TRICOT is a Chilean journalist who writes and broadcasts on Latin American affairs.

Lotte Lautor...

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.

Gano Adalat and politics around it

Sir, Apparently, the Gano Adalat or public court has upset those who had been gloating over harvests from the gradual rehabilitation of the unholy ideals of the defeated forces of 1971 Liberation War. The leading characters of Jamaat-e-Islami are mentioned to be closely implicated with unpalatable facts and truths regarding their not-at-all-glorious role during the war. They have been accused of abetting the hordes of anti-liberation activists who took part in murders, rapes, loot and many other heinous activities against

fellow Bangalees.

At any rate, the Gano Adalat organisers have spearheaded a campaign for a long overdue

cause: they are demanding for the just trial of those who masterminded the masskillings of Bangalees and who took part in it and later on were allowed by the emerging leadership to enjoy total impunity.

They have brought to the

fore hard truths about the successive governments who whipped up patriotic/nationalist sentiments often and actually gave shelter to these criminal elements. As such these war criminals have made almost triumphal comeback to the mainstream politics as national leaders or sometimes as false heroes. The Gano Adalat organizers have successfully put one straight truth that double-dealing and hypocrisy cannot go on unchallenged for infinity: the war criminals can

never be champions of noble causes like democracy.

The AL leaders are giving

wolfish cries against the BNP government as if they have no knowledge that it had been rather AL government who gave a generous amnesty to the mastermind of mass-killing right after being put to power, forgetting their own words to punish war criminals at any cost. The BNP leaders on the other hand deny to take any responsibility at all for rehabilitating the wolves of liberation war. During previous BNP government, a mastermind was promoted to the post of the Prime Minister. They do not want to take any concrete step against these evil characters.

It seems that time started to tell us truths about anti-liberation forces only after the Gano Adalat people succeeded to vocally put forth their campaign. There remains no mystery as regards the cause of the unwillingness of the AL and BNP governments to take action against people like Golam Azam. People do not harbour

any doubt that AL and BNP

leaders served their own in-

terests and dashed off the justifiable causes of the martyrs' families and the raped womanhood. Both the AL and BNP must place humble apology to these aggrieved people before they participate in any debate regarding Gano Adalat. They must admit the gravity of what has been done by them against the humanity by denying the obligation of punishing the war criminals.

It is clear that if the national leadership fail to deliver justice they will also be paid in their own coin. Whether they like it or not, they must get prepared to face in future 'dastardly attacks' from criminal characters they are even if unknowingly, 'idolizing.'

Corruption

that corruption is a familiar

case in every walk of our life.

There is no sector where it is

not prevalent. But the truth is

that no nation can prosper if it

Sir, There is no way to deny

A M Sayed Khan Farashganj, Dhaka.

Sir, We have now formed a

only remain a dream.

West Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

Aktar Uzzaman

letter-writers' forum with the objective to get the words of our letters translated into reality by the concerned authorities. Since our authorities are less attentive towards the letters published in various national dailies and weeklies, we

would make repeated and joint appeals to draw their attention and even approach them directly to help them take necessary actions on the contents of our letters. Meanwhile, I would like to request the relevant authorities to take appropriate actions on the contents of the letters so far written by the under mentioned letterwriters:

writing on the valuable minerals of Cox's Bazar, 'the black gold'. 2) Mr S Sikander Ahmed since long has been urging the government to frame and implement appropriate laws for the development of agroforestry in Bangladesh. 3) Mr Md Anwarul Afzal's suggestions pertaining to Railway track on Jamuna Bridge are very timely.

against the pollution caused by the abuse and misuse of pesticides, must be paid heed to.

the protection of environment

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