The Baily Star

Dhaka, Monday, March 22, 1993

Crisis in Moscow

If Russia is determined to destroy itself, through its current power struggle developing into a bloody civil war, no one can save it, neither Boris Yeltsin nor the West. And most certainly not the communist-dominated conservative Congress whose sole interest now lies in stripping the elected president of all his power, blocking his reform process and, if possible, taking the republic back to some kind of a Stalinist rule, governed under a controlled economy.

At the time of writing, a slim hope for Russia lies in the declaration of a presidential rule imposed on the republic by Yeltsin, which is to continue until April 25 when a special referendum will decide who is to run the country, the president or the legislature. Since it is anything but a consensus decision, far from a compromise between the feuding head of state and the Congress, anything can happen within the next 24 hours. Leading figures in the Congress have already started talking of impeachment of Yeltsin, the court has ruled that the imposition of the presidential rule is unconstitutional and Yeltsin has vowed that he would not let another Bolshevic revolution of the type that changed Russia in 1917, take place again.

One of the most absurd features of the crisis in Moscow today stems from the inability - or unwillingness - of Yeltsin to change the constitution that has totally lost its relevance to the present-day Russia or, for that matter, to dissolve the Congress. Yeltsin is hanging on, precariously and clumsily, under a system that, as far as the Congress is concerned, does not want him any longer. In turning to his people for support through a referendum, the Russian leader is virtually catching at a straw. However, he remains as vulnerable as ever, if not more. The Congress will do everything in its power, perhaps with the help of the judiciary, to block the referendum. Again, can Yeltsin be certain that in a country facing all kinds of shortages, not to mention a severe winter, he has enough grassroots support to win the referendum, even if it is held?

For Russia, now faced with this unprecedented crisis, one that is pushing the country towards a civil war, the only answer lies in throwing the out-dated constitution to the four winds, in putting it where it really belongs, the garbage bin of history. One can even go further and suggest that this is one time in history when a military take-over of the republic by the elected president - Boris Yeltsin - would be fully justified. The problem here lies in the uncertainty that surrounds the republic's defence establishment. Another option, the intervention from outside in support of a democratically elected head of state, is ruled out for a variety of reasons. However, a strong signal of support from the West, especially the United States, could still help Yeltsin in proceeding with his planned referendum. We will see within next few days, perhaps hours, which way the chilly wind is blowing through the snowbound Moscow.

We Won't Forget You, Helen

When Audrey Hepburn died recently, Liz Taylor compared her to an angel and we said Liz just gave word to what was in the mind of millions. including this paper. Now that Helen Hayes is gone at 92 after a life of pristine purity what shall we compare this dovenne of American actors and actresses to? The double Oscar winner shuttled between the stage and the film for over seventy years and put her mark on both without mixing up the media. She never grew beyond five feet and she was the perfect female counterpart of Peter Pan with a harmless sense of humor that easily took in its stride the impurities and other defects of the world. Hers was some sort of an elfin pressure in both Broadway and Hollywood and, without ever succumbing to the irresistible lure of glamour, she held to her childhood family values till her death last week.

Although she made more than a score of movies, the theatre was her real place. And when doctors barred her way to the proscenium saying the dust of the theatre hall was hurting her health she took her leave from where she started at 5 with the nostalgic words, "It's become a reflex. Parlov's actress, that me." She could say that for over six decades she took the curtain call always of an enruptured audience. While she reached the apex of her stage acting career in Victoria Regina' as Queen Victoria, on 969 stagings she happened to be a very fine Shakespearean actress indeed and the bard was very close to her heart.

She didn't want many things for herself. That makes what she wanted with the whole of her being very important indeed for all of us to note and care and take our cue. One of her lifelong dreams was to see, if not meet, only to see Mary Sklodowska, Madame Curie to the world. She had very obviously found her ideal in the double Nobel laureate scientist. She sailed all the way to Europe to take the journey back, this time as a co-passenger of her ideal. No one was allowed on deck when the Madame was taken out for her evening stroll by Eve, her daughter. Helen espied her from some hideout every evening of the journey.

A curious desire seized her on way to a visit of Greece. She wanted to be all by herself in the great Athenian amphitheatre — and take in the feel of how it could be when Aristophanes, Sophocles, Euripedes and so on was performed in Periclean Athens. When she found herself all alone in the amphitheatre, something gripped her as never had so far and she burst out reciting from her dear Shakespeare. This was Helen then, the real Helen behind the filmic and theatrical masks.

Her marrying a completely discordant character, playwright Charles MacArthur, wild and unpredictable, was doomed to totter and fail, thought her admirers. No, it held, as very near to an ideal marriage, for 28 years when her Charlie died in 1956. She lived ever after with his memory alive.

One marvels as to how such a one — dipped fully down in the muck that can be showbiz — could keep her innocence so intact.

Helen's would remain an example almost impossible to emulate. Her uprightness, her goodness, her purity and histrionic power and relentless rise in her calling — make a combination very hard to repeat in one person specially if that person is made to earn for the family from early childhood as an actress in some travelling company.

We would not forget you. Helen Hayes.

Reduction in Public Sector Outlay in the Fourth Plan Marks a Negative Approach

Plan (FFYP) has been scaled down from the original outlay of 68,930 erore taka to 62,000 erore taka. This represents a reduction of

This has been effected through a substantial cut in the share of the public sector in the total outlay from 41,930 crore taka to 34,700 erore Taka. This means a reduction of about 17 per cent in public sector outlay in FFYP (1990-95) and it also signals a decline in the proportionate share of public sector in the total Plan outlay from 61 per cent to 56 per cent.

This declining trend in public sector investment is difficult to understand Significant augmentation of the government's capacity to generate higher funds for investment through greater internal resource mobilisation and tighter control on expenditure is an oft repeated success story. We are being told that the share of internal resources in the Annual Development Plan (ADP) was 25 per cent now and would rise to 42 per cent by the year 1995. Why is this then reduction in public sector investment in FFYP?

No less alarming is a report on poor implementation of ADP appearing in this newspaper. Quoting the One crucial element contributing to poor ADP implementation is the bureaucratic weakness It is reported that some of the ministries, divisions and public sector enterprises do not even hold monthly evaluation meetings. For some agencies, the performance record is totally blank.

implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of the Planning Ministry, the report depicts rather a dismal picture of ADP implementation during the first half of the current fiscal year. This performance, albeit some improvement compared to last year, still falls far short of the targets. Thus, only 27 per cent, i. e., 2363 crore Taka, out of the total ADP allocation of 8650 erore taka for the whole year. has been spent during the first half of the year, i. e. during the July-December period. Against this achievement of 27 per cent in financial terms, the performance in physical terms is even worse at 22 per cent. The usual cliche that ADP utilisation normally goes slow in the first half of the year should not be considered adequate explanation for this performance failure.

It is true that shortfalls in ADP utilisation had been a regular feature in past years. Failure of the Government to generate adequate local resources to finance taka counterpart fund needs had been one of the major causes for the shortfall. However, this no

longer holds true. Delay in project approval had been another major factor slowing down ADP utilisation. This bottleneck has been cleared and the backlog of projects awaiting approval has been virtually eliminated. To rationalise the procurement process, guidelines in this respect

way. Project implementation is being kept under constant review at appropriate levels. Measures that have been taken to improve project implementation and ADP utilisation are indeed impressive and one could on and on, listing those.

And yet ADP implementation shows no improvement.

ALONG MY WAY

S B Chaudhuri

These and various other procedural bottlenecks, for instance the lengthy land acquisition process, that have plagued project implementa-

plagued project implementation in the past, are said to have been removed. Training programmes are being provided to assist the sectoral ministries to improve the preparation of development projects. Project prioritization framework has been further rationalised. Intensive monitoring of nationally important projects are said to be underA substantial increase at the level and efficiency of public investment are essential to support higher economic growth in the coming years. Usually, it is lack of funds which hamper efforts in this direction; whereas in our ease, money is really not the problem, atleast for now. Adequate taka funding for project implementing agencies has been assured while the project aid pipeline grows bigger each

It s almost a no-go situation

One crucial element con-

tributing to poor implementation of ADP in the past is very much in evidence even now, namely, the bureaucratic weakness. This is the offshoot of an inherently cumbersome administrative system, a legacy of our colonial past. A drastic overhauling of the administrative framework for the execution of development projects is

unavoidable

To go back to the IMED review of ADP utilisation, the report underlines the apathetic attitude of different ministries. divisions, departments and key public enterprises responsible for implementing various development projects. Some of them, it is said, would not even comply with the simple directive to hold monthly evaluation meetings. For some agencies, the performance record is totally blank. Even in the case of nationally important priority projects brought under intensive monitoring. performance in a fairly large number of projects have lagged behind.

It is worth noting that at its meeting held last week, the National Implementation Committee for Administrative Reforms (NICAR) authorised

formation of Development Coordination Committees at the thana level. Chairpersons of concerned union parishads will serve as presidents of the Committee by rotation. The local member of the parliament will act as the adviser of the Committee.

Presumably, NICAR took this decision to ensure smooth implementation of rural uplift programmes coming under the allocation in the ADP for infrastructural development work in thanas and districts. One wonders if some such arrangements could not be made for, field level supervision of implementation of all ADP projects.

The importance of undertaking a successful public investment programme for the economic uplift of the country is perhaps escaping the attention of all concerned. There are questions asked. For one thing, can the Government count on the dedication and commitment of the bureaucracy? Should the democratically installed government associate the elected representatives of the people more closely with development projects? After all, commitment may very well be the missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle.

The writer, now a guest columnist of this paper, is a former governor of the Bangladesh Bank

OPINION

Foreign Policy: Constraints Overshadow Many Gains

HERE are many critics, including myself, who cel that the perfornamee by the present Government shows a poor sense of priorities and that, generally speaking, it falls below maybe far below - our expectations. However, if one takes a balanced view, we cannot talk about "non-performance," the term used by your contributor, A'M Mominul Iluq in his attack on the administration published last Thursday.

The article reminded me of a piece by your esteemed guest columnist, Shah A M S Kibria, published a few weeks ago, that referred to "stagnation" on the economic scene.

Such terms, "stagnation" and "non-performance" are simplistic, which obscure several positive gains in many areas, by highlighting the failures. Some say, this is part of the modern journalistic skill which, speaking for myself, does not add to the credibility of scrious discussion on contemporary problems.

Contributor Hug has offered

a set of facts — all negative ones — to focus on the failure of the administration on the economic front. In this respect, he has done better than other critics. The question is, has he looked at macro-economic reforms undertaken by the Finance Ministry, which have been endorsed by many donor agencies, or at the introduction of fiscal discipline? Has he looked at the reduction of the inflation rate? Is there a rise in our export earning?

In the same negative vein, iluq has gone after the Foreign Ministry, blaming it for what he has called "hibernation."

Instead of being carried away by emotions, we should try to understand a number of constraints in the foreign relations of developing country like Bangladesh. In my view, within these constraints, our performance has been anything but dismal. It certainly does not call for sareastic condemnation, like that of Huq. It calls for understanding, careful evaluation.

In the first place, we must recognise the continuity in our Mir Abdus Satter
foreign relations. The frame-

work of our external ties, with major nations, neighbours, the Arab countries and so on and so forth, has evolved over the past two decades. The framework remains in place. We cannot do too much about it, except making some changes here and there, in the hope of improving on it, not in changing it.

Secondly, as a small coun-

try, Bangladesh falls victim to developments in its neighbouring country, India, which even New Delhi has been unable to contain. Hug asks if the Begum Zia's government is maintaining equidistance from Islamabad and New Delhi? Why should such a question arise? Dhaka's policy is to promote good relations with India and other members of SAARC and, at the same time, to recognise the special relations between New Delhi and Dhaka. This relationship goes back to our liberation war and touches on our close trade and economic ties. On balance, Bangladesh Foreign Ministry understands this situation perfectly well. That's why the stage is set for talks on water, for increased trade and even joint ventures, for dealing with smuggling and for open trade? In this context, how can anyone suggest "equidistance" from both India and Pakistan?

The difficulty facing Bangladesh in controlling events in its neighbours also touches on the Rohingya issue. The problem is the creation of the internal development in Myanmar. Mr Huq says, "The Foreign Ministry has not come out with stark facts ... Which were the countries involved in fomenting the issue within Myanmar making Bangladesh a scapegoat?" Dose your learned contributor want the Foreign Ministry to name countries which may also be involved in the crisis — frankly, we cannot be sure who these countries are - and add to our problems? There is something what we call "diplomatic discretion" which is practised well by Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman.

There are a number of factors which have hindered the
repatriation of Rohingya, like
the return of stranded
Pakistanis to the country of
their choice. However, we
must admit that on both these
issues, some movement has
taken place in past two years.
It would have been faster if
Myanmar and l'akistan had
tackled their internal problems better. Dhaka is hardly in
a position to push these countries harder.

The third constraint facing us stems from weaknesses of organisations of developing countries we belong to, ranging from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to OlC. This means that in dealing with problems which affect our bilateral relations with, say India, Myanmar and Pakistan. we are obliged to act virtually on our own, using our devices and skill as best as we can. In this sense, we are in the same situation as many developing countries in Asia and Africa. the Middle East and the Arab bloc? Which of these countries, has taken the kind of initiative that has dazzled contributors to The Daily Star?

We may find fault with the performance of the Foreign Ministry. But let us offer it an alternative agenda, if your contributor can think of one.

The last constraint we must take note of lies in our economic scene. Bangladesh is just too dependent on donor nations to pursue new initiatives in its foreign relations. Just to give one example: Can Dhaka take too firm a line against Myanmar without causing offence to China, Japan and Thatland which want to take cautious line against Yangon? If we are economically strong, say, like Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, we can demonstrate our initiatives in every field, including for-

Contributors to The Daily
Star are welcome to identify
the failures of the present administration. At the same time,
they must focus on our inherent weaknesses which cannot
be wished away by the Foreign
Minister, A S M Mostafizur

S Asia Spends US \$ 18b for Arms Each Year

Prakash Chandra writes from New Delhi

R Mahbub ul liaq is deeply concerned about South Asia.

The development guru, who is adviser to the administrator of the United Nations

of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and author of the agency's annual human development reports, thinks the region seems out of step with the rest of the world.

or ul Haq notes that faced with a choice between investing in air-conditioned jeeps for generals and classrooms for children, South Asia, unlike the rest of the world, is still inclined to choose the jeeps.

"I am worried about South

Asia. This region seems isolated from the changes visible in Europe and Russia, where the people's initiative alone have a population of about two million, with the former's income being three times the latter's. But Oman has one-third the literacy rate of Costa Rica. And life expectancy in this Arab country is ten years less. Social indicators of Oman are a fraction of those of Costa Rica. Again, the United States income is number six in the world, but it is 44th in the world list of child mortality," he says.

UNDP's fourth development report being prepared now confirms Dr ul Haq's assertion that income does not necessarily translate into impressive social indicators. The report examines the human profile of the US in all its aspects, according to Dr ul Haq who revealed, "The human

A freeze on annual defence spending can make available in the next 10 years at least US \$50 billion for meeting basic needs

has changed their political alignments. This has become possible after years of investment in people, which is the best investment for a very fast rate of growth," Dr ul Haq says.

South Asia, with a billion people, "has along way to go in investing in people. The region's literacy rate is lower than any other regions, including that of Africa,"

Dr ul Haq says no govern-

ment can pretend that it has
no money for education, public
health, primary schools, hospitals and other social services.
Money can always be found by
governments if they cut down
unnecessary expenditure.
He points out that a freeze

on the annual US\$18 billion budget for defence in South Asia can make available in the next ten years at least US\$50 billion for meeting basic human needs. Food security, protection of human rights, educational security should get higher priority than border security, Dr ul Haq says.

The UNDP official said countries cannot justify their failure to spend for social services by citing low income.

Income cannot be the only measuring yardstick between countries. For instance, Oman and Costa Rica both

index for blacks in the US is lower than that in many African countries. Similarly, the human index for Hispanics is lower than in many Latin American countries. This, to a large extent, explains the riots in Los Angeles."

India's defence establish-

ment rejects Dr ul Haq's view that military budgets can be safely reduced. "If Pakistan (India's neighbour with whom it has had conflicts in the past) goes on spending for more money than is necessary, can India remain far behind? There is always an arms race between the two countries. They are looking at each other across the national boundaries and shopping desperately for arms. Only a political understanding between the two Prime Ministers can reduce this urge to spend more money on the military," ac cording to defence observers.

Observers note that both countries' Prime Ministers are not engaging in any negotiations which could curb arms spending. Winds of a cold war and near confrontation continue to blow on the sub continent making 'any major changes in arms spending unlikely.

But Dr ul Haq is optimistic

that greater involvement and participation by people will eventually result in major policy changes. "Finance ministers can do nothing without pressure being mounted from the people, non-governmental organisations and the media which have a major role to play now and in the future to change things," he says.

Dr ul liaq says the "seven sins of privatisation" will also be analysed in the Human Development Report 1993. These "sins" are: confused objectives, lack of transparency, concentration of assets, lack of competition, poor financial strategy, dominance of the fiscal objective of financing deficits, and the lack of a political consensus.

Revenue maximisation should not be the objective of privatisation and disinvestment in public sector enterprises, he says. Efficiency and equity should be the goals and the success of privatisation should be evaluated against

these objectives.

The lack of transparency in the privatisation process will be counter-productive and will facilitate abuse. Privatisation has often become a way of enriching a minority and resulted in gains for personal

The privatisation process should also ensure greater competition through more dispersed ownership rather than the greater concentration of assets. Moreover, the financial strategy should be sound.

Dr ul Haq stresses that privatisation cannot be based on unrealistic labour strategy and it should not be the vehicle for bridging budgetary deficits. Nor should it be effected merely through an executive directive. The process should be implemented through the Parliament, after an open debate which facilitates a consensus, rather than simply through an executive order.

Dr ul Haq points out that executive orders can be reversed, thus, causing anxiety and uncertainty.

— Depthnews Λsia

"Window on Asia"

Sir, "Window on Asia" by Shahed Latif published on 06 March 1993 is an excellent indepth study of the social ills, and subsequent health problems, prevailing in our country, or Asia for that matter. have always enjoyed reading his windows, but this one cuts where it hurts, and is indeed thought provoking. However, he has failed to observe that in a male dominated society, the women really have very little to say or do about "not using it and thereby losing it", and here I am not talking about the 00.0001 per cent of the female population who are gutsy enough to want to look charming thru' the years and who also pitch in their bit towards the GDP, but of the many many others who are so bound by the male dominance and whose lives are so poverty stricken, living for them is just a passing of days, bearing children year after year and trying to make ends meet, that they grow old

beyond their years very soon. I would like to relate an observation which is in contrast to Shahed Latif's 72-year-old cheerful lady.

cheerful lady. Early in the morning, I have watched from my verandah, a couple of times, a young couple walking to work. The man is always looking grim and walking fast, holding their child. The woman, barely in her late teens is skipping along to keep up with her husband, but she looks cheerful and that itself gives a glow to her face, which makes her look quite beautiful inspite of her poor attire. It set me wondering about the fate of the woman in a few years time, when she will perhaps have a couple more kids and will have lost some her stamina. I doubt will even recognise her then. It makes me sad to think about

I feel this particular article should be published in a Bangla newspaper to reach more people, and to start the process of guiding our people in the right direction. After all, ten years

be eating vegetables with gusto, but now the health conscious people do eat vegetables, and this change has come about thanks to Government and media efforts. So also a change in outlook and lifestyle of our people can be achieved if this issue is made a national one.

Anis

Anis Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Bilateral relations

Sir, I must thank Mr S. M.
Ali for his article on a new
agenda to tackle Dhaka-Delhi
bilateral relations, published in
your paper on March 16.
Mr Ali deserves special

thanks for coming out with bold suggestions for easing relationship between Dhaka and Delhi. I fully agree with him when he says "If we cannot raise the level of credibility which involves trust and mutual confidence we will be in serious trouble". His concern

may not be shared by many in both the countries but I am happy that at least one person has been as bold to state the fact as it is — concerned as he is of the possible danger of further estrangement—of relations.

His suggestion of allowing the private sector to play a major role in fostering better relations between the two countries deserves special consideration by the entrepreneurs of both the countries. After all "Flag follows the trade".

nisguided by inadequate or inspired briefings or influenced by the comments of those who lack objectivity and whose ideas of forests are obscured by trees.

"1958 not '54"

A M Mominul Hug R K Mission Road, Dhaka

ission Road, Dhaka tm

Str. No sooner had Mr P Haque in his letter 1958 not '54', published in your daily on

March 12, got the date corrected than he himself committed a mistake by saying, in the same letter, that Shaheed All, the then Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan was beaten to death in the National Assembly. As a matter of fact Shaheed Alt was Deputy Speaker of the then Provincial Assembly of East Pakistan when the gruesome incident occurred. The provincial assembly was then functioning temporarily in the assembly hall of Jagannath Hall, Dhaka University.

M Zaman DOLIS, Dhaka Cantt

Chowkbazar

Sir, Chowkbazar is the most important business spot in the city. But it is very regretful to say that it is always packed with rickshaw vans and trucks. The same is with the adjoining areas like Begumbazar, Najimuddin Road, Nawabbari

and Swarighat.

If you need to go from

Chowkbazar to Nawabbari, it will take more than two hours due to the hopeless traffic system.

Business people of this area need a quick and easy movement but, unfortunately we have to waste a whole day to finish a single work.

clearing the way for the transports and in exchange they reportedly ask for money. They even say that they are representing the traffic police! We don't understand who those people are, but they are there everyday.

One just can't do his busi-

ness in a place like this. The

authorities concerned please ensure a good atmosphere for business community at the most important business spot in the city.

A Rahman Swarighat, Dhaka