

POLITICS is an odd game and I understand very little of it. Its variations, change of shades and colour, depending on the time, place and situation, make politics highly illusive — hovering on the border-line of mirage and reality.

With the end of Communism and the Cold War on the one hand and the unifying consensus on the validity of the market economy on the other, the age of ideologies have come to an end in global politics. What has emerged at the national level, in many countries, is politics of secularism versus religious fundamentalism. We are fortunate in having a very homogeneous population. Hence the ethnic variants to politics and anarchy are ruled out, unlike our neighbours and several other countries. On the economic front, supremacy of the open market has no challenge today. If Awami League wins the national election next time, the new Finance Minister would speak the same language: variations, if any, would at best be marginal.

In spite of so much harmony and absence of any major ideological difference, why there is no consensus on at least national development? The two major political parties agree that we must alleviate poverty, maximize economic growth, strive to attain the status of a newly industrialising country, achieve universal literacy and health for all, create employment on a massive scale and speedily reduce our over-dependence on agriculture. These pious hopes and aspirations have been repeated times without number. Yet there is no political consensus on an agreed time-frame; a combined national effort is utterly lacking — why?

The answer lies in the con-

Not Obligation but Conviction

spicuous lack of any conviction that we can ever break out of the vicious circle of poverty — the trap of least development that has kept us so long in misery and destitution. When political leaders talk of economic growth, literacy or health, the words are uttered as a matter of obligation since speeches make good politics.

The canal digging programme is an attempt to revive the old image of development promoted during 1970s. It would make good politics while remaining unconcerned about the otherwise landscape that any unplanned digging might bring about. On the other hand, election pledge to remit all old agricultural debt up to a certain amount was simply a vote catching device, oblivious of the fact that such actions might spell disaster and ruin the minimum of credit discipline that exist within the system. These are the two symptoms of a major illness: (i) lack of any conviction; and, (ii) working within the small ambit of a limited set of obligations. These are good for self aggrandisement in the sort term only; not for long run sustainability.

Export of Natural Gas

In the long run, however, we are all dead. Elections have to be faced only a few years later. It is important to stay clear of any controversial initiative although it could be confronted because of enormous benefits that should eventually follow. The case in point is sale of natural gas to India which could bring at least half a billion dollars, entirely on government account because some interested

quarters might interpret it as a sale-out and therefore affect the popularity. Scarcely it is realized that such accusations must be faced through courage and conviction; there must be the commitment that it could be done and bring in additional half a billion dollars every year for the entire nation to benefit from. As such, sale of natural gas to India is like a hot potato. Political leaders are too scared to touch it.

Natural gas is our capital. An export earning on Government account of at least one billion

mitting political suicide in Bangladesh today.

Unfortunately, there is no leader of the stature and courage of conviction who would dare to stand up to the opposition and utter the unspeakable.

It is, however, not only in politics; the lack of conviction to make the desired efforts by everyone, in every walk of life, I think, the biggest national danger that we face today. There is no commitment. It has simply vanished after 1971. Student politics have

made by mortal beings who nurtured the strategic vision of rapid industrialisation. The deep-seated conviction of the political leadership of the nation will, in the ultimate analysis, determine if in the next century we still continue to be least developed or move up the scale to attain the status of a newly industrialising country.

Commitment for Development

We in the very recent past, have successfully managed a quantum jump through our very rapid pace of political emancipation from an authoritarian regime to a fully democratic, parliamentary form of government. Political power today have not been created by the barrel of a gun. There has been a global reversal of the role of gun-power. Wishes of the people, voluntarily expressed at periodic intervals would ultimately determine the political will of any nation-state.

But after democracy — what? The leaders of the Government and the Opposition must jointly recognise that they can truly command the millions and whose expressed wishes they must uphold. But far more important is the fact that these millions of voters would follow the leaders without any question if a joint commitment for national development is worked out by them. It would be our Magna Carta — the most valuable document that the nation would possess.

Politics of hartal fuelled by mastans is the path of self-defeat. Student politics since the downfall of autocracy have promoted non-education only.

Particularly higher education is in a shambles. During the recent hartal centering on the Mirpur by-election, the picture of a wife carrying her sick husband, on foot, all the way from Sadarhat to Mirpur (The Daily Star, February 7, 1993) because of hartal, must have been seen by many.

The grim face of the woman speaks of pain and sufferings perpetrated on the innocent by political events like hartal which are of hardly any consequence to them. Whatever might have been the justifications, it cannot explain the grim tragedy of the suffering couple, totally innocent of the events that induced the hartal. If political parties believe in democracy then there is a good case to renounce hartal as an instrument of political action. The process to achieve that renunciation can begin if the two national leaders, as stated earlier, agree on a joint commitment for national development. Priority today is to create new jobs, make more investment and ensure greater production. If so, then dislocation in the functioning of the modern sector of the economy, even for a day, is intolerable.

Economic issues are subject matters of statements and lectures. They seem to be obligations that the leaders fulfil. If there are commitment, forthright conviction that we must get out of our present status as a least developed country, then those speeches would be backed up by solid political actions to curb atrocities of mastans, maintain law and order and take measures to sustain peace and tranquility so that economic activities are carried out without any hindrance, fear or favour.

Time is a non-renewable resource. Let us not fool ourselves any longer.

massive credits from the group of seven main economic powers led by the US.

While he may get Clinton's commitment to press for help in both those areas, the US president is unlikely to promise any large, specific amounts. Instead Clinton may use the summit as an occasion for personally assessing Yeltsin's standing as a prelude to decisions to be made at a subsequent meeting of G-7 leaders.

But to underscore his own inclination to help Yeltsin, Clinton can also be expected to pledge assistance in other ways. Yeltsin has already asked the US to join in developing Siberian oil resources and in rebuilding Russia's technological and transportation infrastructure. Those endeavours, along with cooperative ventures in science and space research, will likely be highlighted at a summit that is rich in symbolism but shrouded in uncertainties.

— GEMINI NEWS

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An Important Suggestion

As if we did not have enough problems with natural disasters like cyclones and floods devastating our homes, farms and factories with cruel and unwelcome regularity. Now we are to face another set of problems arising out of the possible effects of global warming. The Secretary General of the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) Godwin Olu Patrick Obasi, on the conclusion of his six-day visit, warned that half of Bangladesh would be affected if the sea water level rose by as little as 65 centimeters. This rise may be caused by an increase of only three degrees Celsius in the world's temperature.

The news is not altogether new to us. We have heard about such predictions and knew that Bangladesh is likely to be in the front line countries to be affected by any change in the world's climate. However, this is for the first time that it has been conveyed to us so directly and by such an authoritative source as the chief of WMO. According our Minister for Forest and Environment, Abdullah-Al-Noman, Bangladesh is likely to lose 12 to 15 per cent of the land area as a result of the type of temperature rise that Prof Obasi was talking about. Given the density of our population and the extreme scarcity of land, the result of losing a significant portion of our land to the sea can only be devastating to say the least. The resultant environmental consequences are better left unmentioned.

The core message from all this is that Bangladesh must take a serious look into all the research on this subject and take all sorts of preparatory measures possible to reduce the impact of such an eventuality. Prof Obasi makes a very concrete suggestion which we must take with utmost seriousness. He suggests that Bangladesh must make it a point to attend all international and regional conferences on the subject of global warming to keep itself abreast of the latest in research, thinking, and international co-operation in the field. Though from the outside it may not appear to be a suggestion with much practical result, yet we would stress, with all seriousness, that there is more to this advise than it may appear at first.

It is impossible to overemphasize the need to strengthen our links with the international community in this regard. Bangladesh does not have the scientific or technological capability to either monitor the changes in the global climate nor is there a need for it. Highly advanced scientific centres are involved in such research and all we need to do is to link up with them. There is no sense in duplicating efforts.

There is another very important need that Prof Obasi underscored in putting forward his suggestion. He said that Bangladesh must negotiate assistance from developed countries to lessen the adverse effects of global warming. If there is any example of a country being affected by the actions for which it is not even remotely responsible, global warming is definitely the most important of them. The gas emission that is causing the world's temperature to rise, and which will affect Bangladesh so badly, is from the industrial West. And yet its impact will drown 12 to 15 per cent of our land mass. The responsibility for this surely lies on the countries that are causing all this to happen. And hence the need to assist us to overcome that impact should be uppermost in their minds. We will have to push that point wherever we can. Here lies the importance of what Prof. Obasi had said and we hope that our government is fully aware of it.

TV Opens New Frontiers

After the Cable News Network (CNN), it is now the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Asia television programmes that have made their way into the drawing rooms of Bangladesh houses. Soon Star TV may join this elite band of visual information networks, thanks to the present government's liberal attitude to free flow of information. The BNP government has done it in two ways: first by allowing the people who can afford to use dish antennae and then employing the service of the Rampura TV centre to telecast programmes of the foreign TV networks received via satellite. In the context of the world becoming a global village, the access to the famed electronic-medium services should no more surprise us. The government certainly deserves one or two kudos for the job.

Yet not everything seems to be contributing to enrichment of the general public's knowledge or is addition to their value system. The fact is that only a small fraction of the population can really follow the language — which is English — used and the rest of the TV viewers have to content with the visual images. Then of course there arises the more important question of the percentage of population the BTVC covers.

While it is time that much of the Bangla speaking rural population of the country may not benefit directly from the CNN and BBC programmes, yet there are many indirect benefits of this exposure that we should be aware of. Being mostly news media, both CNN and BBC are likely to have — or should have — positive impact on our audio-visual and print media. The impact on BTVC should be direct. If the BTVC cannot absorb the freedom-aspect of these two organisations, it should at least absorb the technical aspect, in improving its programming and presentation.

The print media could also learn a thing or two from CNN and BBC. The way in-depth stories are prepared and how interview programmes are conducted are matters of direct relevance to us.

However, the most important aspect of this exposure is to show our people how media bodies — especially TV — should serve their audience. This lesson, which we will hopefully learn from our exposure to CNN and BBC, will be of lasting importance to the growth of free and independent media in Bangladesh.

WHEN it comes to helping Boris Yeltsin, Bill Clinton's wallet may prove much more meagre than the United States president's willingness to aid his beleaguered Russian counterpart.

At the summit meeting between the two leaders, Clinton can be expected to express strong rhetorical support for Yeltsin. The US delegation to the talks, scheduled to begin April 3 in Vancouver, Canada, is also preparing to stage a media spectacle, replete with visual effects designed to illustrate Clinton's commitment to Yeltsin's political survival. By readily accepting the Russian's decree of emergency rule, the young administration in Washington has demonstrated its willingness to take political risks on Yeltsin's behalf.

The summit is being carefully scripted to signal to the world — and especially to the Russian parliament — that Clinton and Yeltsin are forging an equal partnership based on shared values. But beneath the symbolic trappings, the summit will prove striking for the actual inequality between the two sides.

Unlike almost all the previous Moscow-Washington summits, this one does not bring together roughly matched superpowers who will try to intimidate one another as each bargains from a position of strength. For the first time in the history of these meetings, one participant arrives as a desperate supplicant and the other comes to the table as a sympathetic donor.

In Oval Office consultations, the main question to be decided is how generous a gift to present to Yeltsin. As tensions in Moscow rose, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher declared that US assistance was of the highest priority. If the country didn't help Yeltsin, "the price we pay could be frightening," said Christopher.

Despite a clear consensus in favour of trying to rescue a Russian free market, the White House and Congress will probably not be able to supply the Kremlin leader with nearly as

Hat in Hand Yeltsin to Meet Clinton

Kevin J Kelley writes from Washington

A beleaguered Boris Yeltsin is looking to US president Bill Clinton to bail him out of his present predicament. By readily accepting the Russian president's decree of emergency rule, Washington has shown which side it is on in the current power struggle in the Kremlin. Despite favouring free market reforms, the Clinton administration will not likely give the Russian leader much monetary aid at the upcoming summit.

much monetary aid as he wants.

Warnings about federal budget limitations can still be heard on Capitol Hill and Wall Street. A vocal minority continues to argue that the US simply cannot afford to allocate large new sums for any purpose abroad.

According to this school of thought, Clinton will torpedo his own efforts to reduce the budget deficit if he tries to provide Russia with billions of dollars in aid. The fate of the new president's entire economic plan is said by these doubters to rest on Clinton's ability to recognise that the US cannot save Yeltsin, no matter how much money it sends his way.

But this argument has lost much of its potency in recent weeks. With valuable assistance from Republican quarters, Democratic president has made progress in convincing the public that the US must find the necessary funds for a Yeltsin bail-out operation.

Clinton was prodded into taking this unequivocal stance by none other than former president Richard Nixon. In an orchestrated series of newspaper essays and at a private meeting with Clinton, Nixon insisted that the US would be committing an error of historic proportions if it refused even to try to sustain capitalist democracy in Russia.

Nixon's views on this subject are highly influential, despite the political disgrace he suffered in connection with the Watergate scandal. The 80-year-old politician is still widely respected for his in-

sights into strategic issues, particularly those affecting Washington's relations with both Moscow and Beijing.

Affirming Nixon's analysis, Defence Secretary Les Aspin recently cited several reasons why the US has to help Yeltsin to the maximum extent possible. Unless a friendly government remains in place in Russia, warned Aspin, nuclear arms reduction agreements will be jeopardised, along with Moscow's cooperation on foreign policy initiatives in Middle East and the former Yugoslavia.

Aspin contended, moreover, that Clinton's economic plan would be endangered more by Yeltsin's fall than by attempts to prevent it. The president will be unable to achieve his domestic goals without making major cuts in Pentagon spending, Aspin pointed out, reasoning that such reductions will become impossible if hard-liners take control of the Kremlin.

While clearly scoring points with these assertions, proponents of large-scale aid to Russia are having difficulty refuting another claim made by their opponents.

A number of US specialists in Russian economic affairs maintain that vast new outlays would be nothing other than money thrown away. They say Russia is now in such chaotic conditions that funds intended to help stabilise democratic institutions would never reach their destination nor have a beneficial impact.

Those adhering to this outlook point to the problems surrounding an existing \$800 million US contribution to the

dismantling of Russia's nuclear arsenal. Administrators of this programme have been unable to rebut critics who claim that a large portion of the aid is being squandered. Similarly, about half the \$24 billion in aid to Russia pledged last year by the US and its allies has not yet been disbursed, mainly because the Yeltsin government is proving incapable of meeting criteria laid down by the International Monetary Fund.

Opponents of additional assistance add that Yeltsin is probably doomed, and that the alternative to him may not necessarily be hostile to US interests. Clinton's ardent em-

brace of a sinking Russian reformer is thus being likened to George Bush's unqualified support for Mikhail Gorbachev, which continued even after Gorbachev had plainly lost his struggle for political survival. By clinging to Yeltsin even as his grip on power slips, the sceptics say, Clinton will unnecessarily antagonise the next set of Russian leaders.

Given all these considerations, the summit will probably not culminate with a communique that fulfils Yeltsin's hopes. The Russian comes to the summit in need of significant relief from his country's \$80 billion foreign debt and

To the Editor...

Banner in front of

ZIA

Sir, If we cannot write correct English what stops us from writing correct Bangla? This morning (31-3-93), while on the Airport Road I was turning left for going to the Zia International Airport, I noticed on the island on the right a white banner with inscription couched in incorrect English written in blue "World Assembly be sued". I was shocked. How could this banner be allowed to be put up so close to the airport. This sort of funny thing should be immediately removed. That's the gate of entry and exit of our visitors/dignitaries. It is a pity we couldn't write it correctly. Are we that bad in English?

Abu M Fazl
Dhaka-1207

Stipend money

Sir, A developing country like ours needs, meritorious students. And the meritorious students will be encouraged to

show better performance in the examinations when they will get something as a token of recognition of their merit.

There are many meritorious poor students who prosecute their higher studies with stipend money. But, unfortunately, they are not getting their stipend money for more than one year. This stoppage has brought despair in the mind of many poor but meritorious students. It is learnt that the stipend money could not be given for want of budgetary allocation of fund.

We have given top priority to education. So the fund allocation for stipend should also get priority. A small amount of money will surely bring a big smile. The students will be inclined to do better.

So we earnestly request the government to allocate fund for stipend, so that the meritorious students do not lose their enthusiasm in matter of studies. They are country's asset. Their well-being should get top priority.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury
DGM, Sonali Bank, Dhaka

Office hours

Sir, Existing office hours of government and semi-govt offices of Dhaka are from 8 am to 2-30 pm. In summer the sun rises at around 5 am so it won't be a problem at all if the office starts at 7-30 instead of 8 am.

The offices break at 2-30 at present and the officials cannot reach home before 3-30 when it becomes too late for lunch.

Some people might advance the argument that some employees will be late if offices start at 7-30. But the habitual late comers will be late even if the offices start at 10 am. The previous office time of 7-30 am to 2-00 pm was very popular and convenient. Hence I urge upon the democratic government to give a second thought to the matter and re-fix the office hours from 7-30 am to 2-00 pm at least for the summer.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury
Dhaka Cantonment

Justice Murshed: A Symbol of Indomitable Courage

by Nurul Islam Khan

HE suddenly appeared in the limelight and almost immediately became everyone's idol.

There appeared a judgement of the Chief Justice of the then East Pakistan High Court, which began thus

*O! it's excellent
To have a giant's strength;
but tyrannous
To use it like a giant
— Shakespeare (Measures for Measure)*

This powerful quotation and its apt use stirred many in the course of their mundane everyday life. But for those, who then ruled, for the high and mighty, these aphoristic lines were extremely disconcerting. The man who created a stir all over the then Pakistan, was no other than Justice S M Murshed. Prolonged martial law had sapped the vitality of a new nation; had dampened the aspirations of its youth and had created impediments in the emergent of new creative ideas. M R Kayani, who with an ironical humor had assailed the martial law authorities, had expired after a short illness in Chittagong, while on an intellectual sojourn. Martial law had left in its wake a political system which was incompatible with the working of free and liberal politics. But for the energetic, there was plenty to do as free enterprises prospered; many jute mills, textile mills and other industries emerged in the then East Pakistan. But that is a different story. Today, April 3, on the occasion of the 14th anniversary of death of Justice S M Murshed, we recall his contributions.

Just as Basic Democracy made the holding of free general elections impossible, the might of the military behind the supreme commander Gen. Ayub Khan held every one in a long period in office make one grave error of believing themselves as powerful as indestructible. They become intolerant to criticism and endeavour to crush any opposition. The period, I speak of, was a time when the government had a powerful control over



the legislature. The judiciary was the only independent institution in the country and the sole avenue for establishing the rule of law and principles of justice.

But this necessitated men of courage and integrity who could move the conscience of the nation. No men fitted this description in a fuller manner than Justice Murshed.

Behind his massive appearance lay a man of many parts. I met him for the first time in the later part of 1964 in the Old High Court building. A judge, in addition to his intellectual powers, needs to be a man of integrity — made of a strong moral fibre in order to be impartial to the various disputing parties coming to him for justice. Justice Murshed enjoyed a reputation of a man who could not be moved by fear of flattery.

I had not expected, as a junior officer, the warm welcome which he extended to me. My conversation with him was encouraging as he remarked that an officer who could prove himself worthy stood a chance of being elevated to the bench (High Court). He added that the position of a judge is an extremely independent ethical calling where one can obey his conscience and, above all, derive an immense amount of moral satisfaction.

I was very pleased with these statements and began to

work in earnest. Justice Murshed had occasion to find my work praiseworthy. As an Addl District and Sessions Judge, he summarily dismissed six appeals against my judgements in civil cases. A criminal appeal, involving a life sentence, received similar treatment. There's a great distance between the High Court and the district courts not only physical but also due to the fact that the pronouncements of the district courts rarely came to the notice of Justice Murshed. And it was Justice Murshed who bridged it.

It is my firm belief that under his (Justice Murshed) guidance and the value he placed on the work of the lower court, there was a source of inspiration for us and that made us all more eager to our work. He knew all the district judges personally, on first name basis, and treated them with affection. He knew all those district judges who could quickly dispose of cases. This is a point of relevance in a discussion on Justice Murshed's qualities, because he was personally responsible for restoring a sense of purpose and vitality in the lower (district) judiciary.

He keenly appreciated the frustrations and the difficulties of lower court judges and undertook numerous tours of district courts. During these visits he called upon the district judges to fearlessly defend truth and justice. These visits would thus cause the local administrators not only to be attentive to the Chief Justice but also the local judiciary. The prestige of the local judiciary was greatly enhanced by these tours.

Has the nation extended full recognition and respect to this great man of indomitable courage? A time will come in the near future when this question will need to be answered. Are we to forget the great men of our time? Certainly not ever. We must live with the memories of the great personalities who lived with a purpose and are no longer with us.