

# The Emerging Balance of Power and the Arms Race

## Go Public on SKOP Demands

After the miserable failure of the last 48-hour work-stoppage programme of SKOP, this illegal conglomerate body of trade unions and employee association is now preparing itself for the next onslaught of another 72-hour programme starting from 11th May. However, this time there is a difference. In addition to stopping their own work, the SKOP activists plan to force others — who are neither their members, nor in any way involved with their programmes — to stop work as well. In other words, while the last was a call for work-stoppage, this time it is a call for a nation-wide strike. The nation has to stop, so that they can get more wages. So, there is not only a changed agenda on SKOP's part, there is also a changed approach. The last time the SKOP just announced its programme and expected it to work, as it did during the autocratic regime of Ershad. However this time, there appears to be an elaborate preparation. Country-wide propaganda meetings and negotiations with local workers' bodies form part of the programme. However, the most important of such dialogues is taking place with opposition political parties.

Last time, other than Workers Party, all others refused to back the SKOP call. The lack of support of the Awami League was crucial, and it considerably weakened the SKOP's programme. So the question is, what the government is doing to take the wind away from the SKOP's sail, and to prevent the strike call from being carried out. On previous occasions, we noticed the disturbing attitude of the government to take no notice of such programmes till the very last moment, and then go panicky, hold closed door negotiation and avert a crisis by making all sorts of deals to prevent an immediate show-down.

It is our view that without any further loss of time, government should open dialogue with the genuine leaders of the workers and employees to persuade them to desist from the type of action they have announced. It should also open a similar dialogue with the political opposition, especially the AL, to persuade them not to back the 72-hour strike call. After the Pahela Baishakh incident AL will be in no mood to cooperate with the government. But there is no reason why an attempt should not be made.

Government should also go for a public information offensive on the issues relating to the SKOP demand. A concerted effort should be made to take the public into confidence, and through factual and well-argued TV and print media items, create a genuine public resistance to the SKOP's agenda.

We have repeatedly argued that a minimum wage across the board, for all sectors, is neither fair nor realisable. It negates the basic principle of capacity to pay. The well-argued case of linking wages to productivity must find a place in the tripartite dialogue of the trade unions, the employers and the government.

The SKOP's demand to stop the policy of disinvestment is a direct challenge to the government's policy. It is also a challenge to the opposition's position.

All said and done, in a democratic set up, if the SKOP can persuade its affiliate trade unions to go for a work-stoppage, we cannot oppose it, provided it is carried out peacefully. But what we do oppose — and vehemently so — is their programme to force the nation to do the same. However, we believe in a negotiated settlement of this vexing issue. We urge the SKOP leaders to think of the precarious condition of our industries, and the near collapse of our economy. We also draw their attention to the need of maintaining our competitive edge in the global market. On the other hand, we invite the government to come up with a wage package that provides incentive to our workers, creates the right type of environment for industrial growth, and does so without further undue burden on our fragile economy. It is a tall order. But nobody said governance was easy.

## Blurred Economic Value

If comparison is one easy way of drawing inferences and rationalisation, then someone from Narayanonji had the ingenuity to compare between the prices of rice and fertilizer, between the prices of medicine and fish. At first sight somewhat beguiling, the comparison today however is no more out of place, for, wonder of wonders, this time the comparisons were found to be apt as in some places in this wonderland(!) rice and fertilizer sell not just at comparable but same price. What has been left unmentioned is that wheat also sells at the same price as well. Upto this point, people's shock-absorbing capacity has by now seems to have been extended. But drawing comparison between fish price and the sale tag of the precious life-saving drugs could well sound outlandish except for the obtaining situation favouring neither of the commodities in terms of monetary value.

The common practice however is that people compare anything overvalued to gold. Here no such comparison was made. But why medicine? The obvious ready-made answer is that however precious gold may be, one can do away with it. But not so with medicine when attacked by diseases. For the Bangalees, fish is one such food item they cannot dispense with. However catchy the latest slogan, propounded by the Prime Minister, 'dal bhat for all' may sound, fish and the Bangalees have gone together for centuries and asking them to forsake the item would be considered a gross injustice. This is why one of them has not taken the unusual scarcity of fish so well, and even then without losing his sense of caustic humour has made the apparently unlikely comparison.

Nobody however asks the government to take the country back on to the golden track of Sayesta Khan's era. That surely is an impossible job. The paradox however is that rice sells at prices mostly much below the production cost. When even the developed countries are giving subsidies to their farmers in various forms, our recipe, unfortunately, is quite different. We have not only to withdraw whatever little subsidies the farmers here enjoyed but also make the agricultural inputs further costly. The disincentive invited in the process may have serious adverse impacts on the production of rice. This is one prospect every discreet government must try to avoid. After all, the country is yet to be self-reliant in food production.

THE recent confrontation between North and South Korea, triggered by North's Korea's abrogation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), has highlighted the shift in the balance of power in the Pacific Rim. North Korea abruptly withdrew from the treaty and refused to allow the inspection of its nuclear weapons sites. This sent tremors across its borders. South Korea and its allies — in particular the United States — were very nervous about the intentions of Kim Il Sung. As a result, all the key players in the region have started a serious re-assessment of their security situation.

It should be noted here that South Asia is not usually included when security in the Asia-Pacific region is considered. When the Americans or the Japanese or even the ASEAN countries talk about 'Asian' security they exclude South Asia from their calculation. The sub-continent is not a part of the 'Asia' that they have in their mind. Economically weak, fragmented by internal squabbles and engrossed in their own historical and communal enmities, South Asia is ignored by the rest of the world. The new economic and trade group, the Asia-Pacific Cooperation Council (APEC), launched a few years ago at the initiative of Australia, pointedly excludes South Asia. In any case the South Asian countries have not played any significant role beyond the borders of the sub-continent and certainly not in the affairs of East and South East Asian region. No one seems to believe that the countries of this poor region will exert, in the foreseeable future, any influence in shaping the balance of power that is emerging in the Pacific Rim.

China, Japan, the United States, Russia, the ASEAN countries, Taiwan and the two Koreas are the main actors on the stage in the Pacific Rim. The end of the cold war has disrupted the balance of power that maintained peace and stability in the region. Admittedly it was a heavily armed peace but for forty years — since the Korean war — it held. One consequence is the rapid economic growth that has transformed the area from a largely agricultural to an industrialized region. The region's fast increasing industrial and agricultural exports are today posing a serious challenge to those of Europe and America.

The United States may not accept that it has pulled out from the Asia-Pacific region but there can be no doubt that its departure from the bases in the Philippines has shaken the confidence of its friends and allies. Apart from the nuclear arsenal in Korea and perhaps Japan, the Americans have, reportedly, 45,000 troops in Japan and 37,000 troops in South Korea. Under the pressure of economic crunch American troop strength in Asia is not likely to increase, certainly not in the near future. Besides, the end of the cold war has removed the most important strategic reason for large US military presence in Asia. Russia is still a great military power but it does not pose the kind of threat that it did during the cold war. Thus those Asian countries, who enjoyed the US military umbrella, feel that they are really on their own. Feeling like small fish in a hostile sea full of sharks, they do not like

it. Indeed, countries such as Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, Thailand and even Indonesia look back to the days of massive American military presence in Asia with nostalgia. Most security experts think that four powers will dominate the post cold war security order for Asia — China, Japan, Russia and the United States. Regional peace and stability can be ensured if these four powers are able to negotiate and build up a security structure along the lines of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). However, the cultural and racial homogeneity of Europe

about North Korean attempt to possess nuclear weapons. Such situations can be contained if similar convergence of views emerge among them. However, other countries in the region are not taking chances. Conscious about their vulnerability, they are not content to depend on others for their security. As a matter of fact the East and South East Asian nations are now rich enough to indulge in a shopping spree for arms. East Asian nations made 35 per cent of all major weapons purchases in 1991. China has raised defense spending by a whopping 50 per cent over the last two

Some experts believe that the end of the cold war has created a power vacuum leading to this arms race while others think it is the American pull out from Asia which is responsible for the sense of insecurity now prevailing in these Asian countries. President Clinton, according to these experts, is an unknown factor. No one knows for sure the role that the US would play under his leadership. The role of Japan in all these developments remains an enigma. Some countries in South East Asia which were occupied by Japan during the Second World War consider Japan's emergence from the shadow of the United States as the most serious threat to their security. But no one can ignore Japan's economy might. Despite wide-spread suspicion about its long term goals it is trying to play the role of an architect of Asia-Pacific security.

At a meeting in Tokyo last month Japan and the ASEAN countries have agreed to convene a meeting of senior officials from Asia-Pacific countries to discuss security problems in the area. The meeting is scheduled to be held in Singapore in May. Other participants, apart from Japan and the ASEAN countries are Australia, Canada, EEC, New Zealand, South Korea and the United States. There are some moves to include China, Russia, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Vietnam's economic weakness has taken the shine from its image as a military power. It is very busy these days with its economic agenda but it is still a military power to reckon with and it will have to be included in any security structure that will be erected. (South Asia has not been even mentioned) The meeting will consider the feasibility of setting up a multilateral security forum for the region. Such a forum, it is argued, will facilitate the peaceful settlement of disputes such as the one in the Korean Peninsula or the Spratly's islands in the South China Sea.

## ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

is absent in Asia which is vast in size and population, diverse in its historical and cultural background and unequal in economic status. Many experts believe that, unlike Europe, a more flexible but interlocking network of bilateral, sub-regional and region-wide arrangements will be necessary to establish and maintain peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region.

The current UN operation in Cambodia is the result of agreement between these four powers within the framework of the UN Security Council. One does not know if such cooperation will be possible elsewhere but unless there is a broad measure of agreement among them the region's security will remain fragile and vulnerable. Since all four powers have interests in the stability of the Korean Peninsula, they share a common concern

years. It has embarked on a major military overhaul, including an expansion of its blue water fleet. This has aroused apprehensions that China might enforce its claims on Spratly islands by force. Singapore raised its defence budget in 1991 by 23 per cent. Taiwan, Malaysia and Thailand followed suit with double-digit spurts. Taiwan reportedly bought 150 F-16s from the US and wants to buy more. It is also buying submarines, anti-sub helicopters and naval vessels. These are expressions of its determination to remain free from the control of mainland China. South Korea, alarmed by the North Korean nuclear weapons, is not lagging behind in the arms race. Some of these nations are becoming major arms makers and exporters and are also expanding their capacity to attack as well as defend.

# The Uncertain General who could Play Key Role

Andrei Martov writes from Moscow

TENSIONS in Moscow have risen with the latest constitutional crisis and once again all eyes must be on the army, and above all the Defence Minister, Gen. Pavel Grachev. Publicly Grachev joined other key ministers in pledging his loyalty. But behind the rhetoric, Grachev's relations with Yeltsin and with the army itself, are dangerously ambiguous.

Every morning at ten o'clock, Grachev picks up the telephone to Yeltsin and speaks for five minutes, giving him the daily situation report. Their personal contact goes back to June 1991, when Yeltsin, the newly elected Russian president was under threat from the Soviet army and KGB. Yeltsin was seeking the support of reliable elements as he set about forming a new Russian government. He was already thinking of the creation of a Russian army, but had no idea how to go about it. Grachev helped him.

As a paratrooper commander, Grachev reasoned that a sovereign Russia would need an army, and therefore a Defence Minister. In June he put on a military demonstration for Yeltsin, and out of this grew friendly relations.

Then came the attempted putsch in August, 1991. Grachev was caught undecided. If he backed his superior, Marshal Yazov, and the other putschists he might expect promotion, but he would still be far from the top. If he backed Yeltsin, he might do much better.

Rather than make a decisive choice, Grachev played a double game. Obeying Yazov, he sent a force of paratroopers to Moscow with vague orders. At the same time, communicating with Yeltsin behind Yazov's back, Grachev agreed to send some tanks to the besieged Russian White House. In this way, it looked like he was defying Yeltsin, although it would have taken only seconds for the tankmen to train their guns in the opposite direction.

When it was clear that the putsch had failed but its leaders were still at large, Yeltsin offered Grachev the future post of Russian Defence Minister, at the same time asking him to help arrest the plotters. Grachev agreed. In the event, the plotters were arrested without him. But this did not stop Yeltsin from making Grachev a hero and even offering him the post of Soviet Defence Minister, an action which was not yet properly within Yeltsin's authority.

Grachev declined, saying he was not ready for such a responsibility. Instead the post was given to the anti-putschist Air Force Gen. Yevgeni Shaposhnikov. Grachev became his deputy.

In the following months, as the Soviet Union broke up and morale in the army deteriorated, Grachev remained on the sidelines, charged with preparing a military reform programme. His chances of gaining Russia's top military job were temporarily eclipsed by those of other generals — Shaposhnikov, Konstantin Kobets, another defender of the White House, and Vladimir Lobov, the army chief of staff.

But early last year all three fell out of the running: Shaposhnikov became commander of the purely strategic troops of the new Commonwealth of Independent States; Lobov was sacked; and Kobets spoiled his prospects by quarrelling with colleagues.

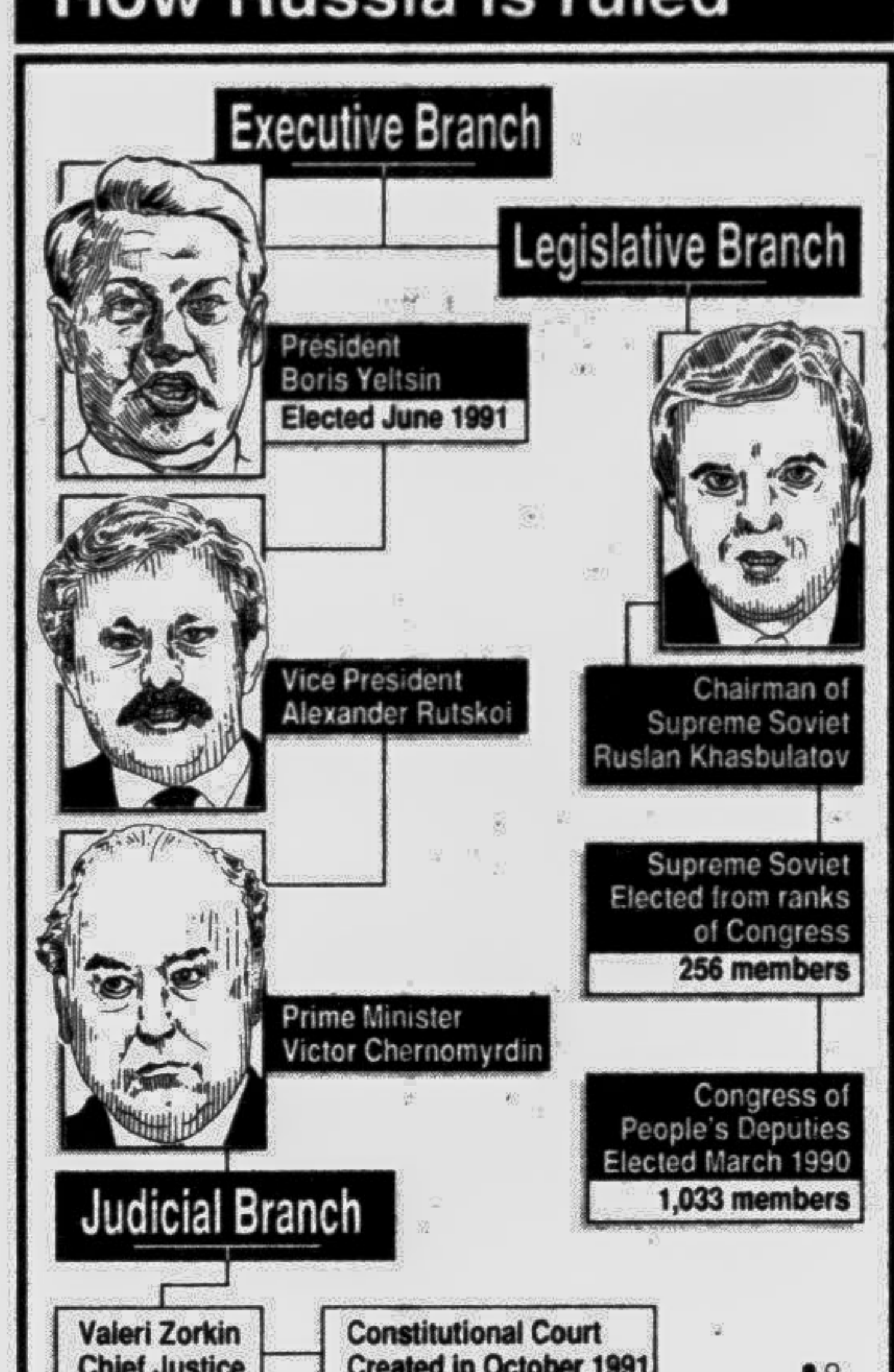
The role of the army will be crucial in determining the outcome of the current power struggle in Moscow. In the uncertainty of Russia's constitutional crisis, many are looking to the Defence Minister, Gen. Pavel Grachev. Although he owes his job to Yeltsin, he does not always support the President's policies. As parliament and the president fight it out, a special Gemini News Service observer in Russia says this dangerously ambiguous military man could shape the Kremlin.

Grachev's way to the Defence Ministry was unopposed. At first, Grachev's appointment last May raised hopes that the new Russian army would become an island of internal stability. He instituted an eight-year restructuring plan and called for improvements in social conditions, including decent accommodation for troops repatriated from abroad.

But, drawn willy-nilly into the political ring, he went, like an amateur boxer with insufficient professional coaching, from one blunder to another. The first crisis was a back-handed present from Yeltsin himself. An agreement had been reached with the government of Latvia for the withdrawal of Russian troops there. But the troops rebelled and refused to leave during the winter. Grachev was attacked for having put his signature to the timetable. A second crisis occurred when he was accused — with Yeltsin's tacit approval — for failing to check the high level of desertions, the bullying of young soldiers and other irregularities within the army, which was supposedly evolving under his reform package.

In the last stage of the power struggle, starting last autumn, Grachev, sought to redeem his standing with Yeltsin by declaring that the Defence Ministry and army supported the President — not

## How Russia is ruled



the Russian constitution or parliament, or people, but Yeltsin in person.

Though Yeltsin dropped his idea of forming a new party, Grachev found himself targeted by the anti-presidential opposition at a moment of acute crisis. At the seventh Congress of People's Deputies in December, deputies fearing a snap declaration of presidential rule, summoned key ministers to say where they stood.

Grachev was sick, but was sent for from hospital. In front of the Congress, he quickly took stock of the situation, and forgetting his allegiance to Yeltsin, pledged loyalty to parliament, the constitution and the people.

Early this year Grachev came under attack in a more organised fashion, from both the left and the right. In February, elements of the radical right combined with com-

munists and national-patriots in holding an illegal all-army officers' meeting.

The gathering, organised by the 'Union of Officers' under retired Col. Svatcheslav Terekhov, declared Grachev responsible for dismantling the country's defences, allowing the break-up of the armed forces, and betraying national interests. It proposed bringing him before a tribunal of officers.

In March, members of the radical left Army Reform group, led by Lt. Col. Vitaly Uraitsev, organised an extra-parliamentary hearing. Grachev was attacked for failing to carrying out reforms, allowing the spread of corruption in the army, and hiding statistics about crime. The hearing ended with a demand for his resignation.

The worsening of the crisis has led many politicians, fearing anarchy, to look for a stronger Defence Minister. But who?

The left would like a civilian, but if there is a candidate it is keeping him under wraps. The 'Army Reform' group, organisers of the March 1st hearing, would like Lobov, the former army chief of staff who was fired. The right has a 'ministerial alternative' in Col. Gen. Vladislav Atehalov, a pro-communist national-patriot who barely escaped trial after the putsch.

The right is better organised than the left, and has already started forming volunteer paramilitary groups. But neither side is yet strong enough to install its own candidate. As Grachev himself has warned, in this case convincingly, that unless a constitutional solution is quickly found the army is liable to split, with the imminent danger of all-out civil war.

ANDREI MARTOV is the pseudonym of a senior Russian military commentator, writing from inside the current crisis.

## To the Editor...

### Import of goods

Sir, Our tendency to import various items is increasing every year. As a result of this, local industries are incurring losses and foreign companies established here are in a position to close down their business. ICI and Pfizer are the very recent examples besides many others.

Recently, electric bulbs and fluorescent tubes are found to be imported from our next door neighbour. How long multinational and other good local companies will fight for survival, only time can tell. We want established foreign companies not to leave Bangladesh and local companies/industries not to take shelter in intensive care units.

I think our Government should make best possible efforts to stop import of those items which are produced in Bangladesh and are of quite

satisfactory standard. Fall of industries will bitterly hit our national economy and employment situation.

Motius Samad Chowdhury  
Assistant Manager  
Phulola Tea Estate, Sylhet.

### Advice and love

Sir, Congratulation to Shaheen Anam for the thoughtful write up on 'Responsibilities and Reasons' published in The Daily Star write to Mita on April 02, 1993. However, some of the observations are as under:

'Friendship ends where borrowing begins' that is, when repayment is not made. Similarly contradictions between the wife and the husband begin to grow when the understanding between the two begins to cool down.

In the absence of the burning love between the wife and the husband, the understanding is sure to cool down. And

in the absence of love, no amount of advice can help the growth of understanding between the wife and the husband even if they may live under the same roof.

'Career woman' is a term used all over the world, however, no man perhaps likes the term when it is used for his wife or daughter, except the exceptions.

All over the world, except some tribal societies, the husband has been normally considered to be the head of the family, even though there are so many families where the wives play the vital role in the families in most of the cases.

Advice to Rana in the write up would be acceptable, had she been described to be the wife who plays the vital role in the family. However, in the write up Sayeed has been indirectly described to be the husband who plays the vital role in

the family. Consequently the advice given to Rana in the write up is correct, say, to the tune of 25% since the points of Love and Understanding are not clearly described.

Advice to Sayeed, on the other hand, contains a connotation of command. Command is good outside the family and friendship, while love and understanding are the vital points to create the congenial atmosphere in the family, the wife and husband. And sacrifice is one of the fundamental points where from love and understanding begin to grow.

Personality clash in the family is a dangerous point that has always to be eliminated why a husband who plays the vital role in the family does not wish his wife to be a career woman, even though she may have been a career woman before her marriage? Before marriage every gender is wonderful and every goose is a

beautiful queen, however, after the marriage the husband is often not considered to be wonderful nor the wife is considered to be the queen and that is beginning of the problem.

To meet to know, to love and then to depart is the saddest story of many a human life. Love is blind, and hence neither the wife nor the husband would ever know each other to the last point of difference before marriage and hence sacrifice to love, love to understanding are essential prima facie.

Andrew D'Costa  
Hemendra Das Road, Dhaka

However the Directorate of Savings does not publish any statistics regarding total savings collected from the sale proceeds of the Prize Bonds. The general public should know what is the total circulation position of Prize Bonds and how many series are there in circulation now; how many bonds are lying with the general public as savings and how many of them are still lying in the banks, what total amount of prizes are given in a particular draw?

Whether the rate of savings remains profitable even after giving the prize money? If it remains profitable the government should go for issuance of more bonds of different denominations to promote internal savings as the depositors are looking for better return against their deposits.

Mahbul Haque Chowdhury  
Kalabagan, Dhaka.

### Prize Bond

Sir, The spirit behind introduction of Prize Bond scheme was to mobilise internal savings and combat inflation.