The Parily Star

Dhaka, Monday, July 26, 1993

Challenges for Pakistan

A caretaker government is seldom more than a lame-duck administration, serving a limited purpose, within a specific deadline and with well-defined constitutional authority. However, as we saw with the interim government of Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed that paved the way for the establishment of the parliamentary government of Begum Khaleda Zia, even a caretaker administration can serve as a model for integrity, honesty and a purposeful drive towards positive changes. The Shahabuddin government also succeeded in raising the level of optimism in politics of Bangladesh.

It is now the turn of Pakistan. After months of turmoil when politicians virtually took the country apart, an internationally noted economist has taken over as a caretaker Prime Minister of an interim government. The 63-year old Moeen Qureshi, formerly one of the senior-most officials of the World Bank, who heads the caretaker administration, may be quite different, most certainly in background, from Justice Shahabuddin and facing more difficult challenges than those encountered by the former Acting President of Bangladesh. Yet, we must note with interest, Qureshi has been sending out the right signals and establishing a style of his own.

One of his early statements relate to the need of electoral reforms in Pakistan. Unless we have the details, we would not know how far the Acting Prime Minister will go in this sensitive area. Here, just changing the voting age won't do. Unless he has already thought about it or done so, he will be well-advised to set up a permanent election commission, as we have done in Bangladesh, under an eminent jurist. Meanwhile, Qureshi has started consultations with leading political contenders, especially Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto, obviously enlisting their support for holding a free and fair election in the country, now scheduled for October 8 and 9.

Having just announced a devaluation of Pakistani currency, another area that has caught the attention of the former WB expert is the economy of Pakistan which he finds "in a shambles". Here, too, he will be able to offer some new guidelines and set examples of transparency and accountability, notwithstanding constraints on his time and authority.

It is now up to Pakistan's politicians, especially Sharif and Bhutto, to respond to the signals from Qureshi. Both are in their usual fighting mood, offering dark hints about drug money being used in a rigged election. Soon the country will witness mass rallies, cheering crowds, unchecked public emotion let loose. However, are there some signs that the parties concerned are formulating their socio-economic programmes, presenting new ideas on the country's uncertain external relations in the post-Cold War era and outlining a fresh approach, if it is possible, to Indo-Pakistan relations? Are there some indications that the major parties will bring in younger members to the parliament, whose commitment to the development of the country is matched by their political concerns? To such questions, we are yet to get any answers.

Benazir Bhutto may well be right in saying that the October election could well be "the last chance for democracy in Pakistan." She may also be right in warning the country about vote rigging and the danger of an army takeover. From all this distance, our plea to Bhulto - and indeed to Sharif - is that these politicians should start thinking of the future of Pakistan in much broader terms, beyond just ritualistic re-establishment of democracy. In the past, especially during the past six months, they gave the country a raw deal. Now, they have a chance of changing the basic scenario. Here, they may have much to learn from the Acting Prime Minister.

A Genocide on Trees

One wouldn't know how to react to such a gem of a piece of news. A report from Natore published in Saturday's The Daily Star says a project to secure a charland in Lalpur Thana has come to nought owing to strange circumstances. Under the project a 10-square-mile chunk of the thana, converted into a char through river erosion, was sought to be saved by planting 1.5 lakh tress on an area of 300 acres. The cost of it came from the European Community. The government settled there some 494 landless families so that they would look after the nurture of the saplings into trees.

So far so good. The people of the nearby Bheramara thana in Kushtia, then started demanding that the char belonged to their thana. They didn't stop at that. Going into action thus raided the char for about 15 times but did not touch any one of the settled families. They cut down a hefty part of the hardwood shishu trees, numbering not less than 10 thousand.

Lalpur Thana police went to Bheramara to nab the culprits, a couple of hundreds in number and none too unknown characters. Strangely enough, they returned without laying hands on a single criminal. A question now hangs in the desolate air of the char — will the Bheramara goons be allowed to cut down the remaining trees in their good time and will that help annexing the char by Bheramara?

Violent conflicts involving rights over charland are both old and familiar — this is as good as a tradition in the riverside regions. Many die in these clashes and many are left maimed for life. Many are the families that are ruined. We are relieved that no such tragedy overtook the char people this time.

The point now is — is the action any less gruesome for all that? We have come a long way in the last decade from the State vandalism that was perpetrated on the trees of the avenues of Dhaka and other cities and of the highways. How can one ever forget government cutting down the raintree inside what is now the Foreign Ministry as also the giant in front of it that housed a rare species of Bougainvillea. Or for that matter the glorious Nagalingam at the crossing of Minto Road and Hare Road. The BIRDEM authorities, one of the best known of philanthropic bodies in the land, could not be persuaded not to cut the raintree that presided regally over the entire Shahbagh-Ramna vista. And now comes this shocker from Natore.

Cutting down public trees should be a punishable offence enforced in such a manner that it succeeds as a deterrent. Organisations government, autonomous or even private must first be persuaded that trees inside their respective compounds cannot be felled at will. That felling trees wantonly is not only morally wrong but also a crime as cruel as a murder and inviting as dire a consequence.

The culprits of Bheramara must be taken to task without fail and delay.

Improving Pisciculture and Fishermen's Lot The country's 48,000 square nautical miles of fishing ground in the Bay offers tremendous scope for meeting the

S we see from the recent conference in New York at the United Nations and an earlier one in Tokyo, the international community is getting increasingly worried about finding a way to conserve and ensure sustainable use of world's fish resources. Fishing grounds in the Arctic, Atlantic and the Pacific - you name it - everywhere, are being used

up to near extinction. Back at home, the Consu mers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) says that the price of fish recorded the maximum rise in the year ending on June 30, '93. According to the CAB survey, fish topped the list with price rise of a hefty 31.20 per cent, followed by meat with 16.88 per cent. Turning newspaper pages, you read smuggling of Indian fish rampant', a not too infrequent headline these days. By now, we have got nearly used to eating of the cattle that trots along from across the border - meat on the hooves, you might call it. Now, fish from the river has joined the stream!

There is no need to look far and wide to locate reasons for this phenomenon. It's simply that yield of fish in the country did not keep pace with rising demand, coming mainly from growth in population. According to available data, production of inland and marine fresh fish was 8.14 lakh metric tons in 1970-71. Production in 1986-87 was 8.15 lakh metric tons, in 1991-92 it was 9.30 lakh metric tons and for 1992-93, the total yield is being put at about 10 lakh metric tons. There, you have the reason! Production of fish in the country has remained nearly static during the first 15 of these 22 years. Naturally, per capita availability resources. Instead of being reexcavated, derelict ponds and tanks in villages have been filled up for growing grains and so is the case with low-lying land along the outer fringes of lakes, haors and baors. Indiscriminate use of pesticides and insecticides in paddy lands made no less a contribution to the decline of fish population. Lower catches have encouraged overfishing irrespective of the breeding season, contributing further to the depletion of fish

resources. Laws such as, mora-

torium on driftnetting, use of

fine-mesh drag-nets, catching

fish frys and finger-lings, do not

always deter overfishing as long

of fish has come down. The rate

of population increase in these

two-odd decades has out-

stripped the overall growth rate

of fish production in the coun-

nancy in fishing sector are also

well known. Encroachment of

paddy land into fishing grounds

is perhaps one of the prime rea-

sons for the low growth of fish

The reasons for the stag-

as supply scarcity persists. Inland fishing grounds will, in all probability, shrink further in the years ahead. Understably, current efforts at increasing inland fish resources are directed towards extension of breeding in controlled water bodies such as ponds and tanks, streamlining fish culture in larger water areas such as haors and baors, expanding supply of fish fry through intensive cultivation at hatcheries, applying semi-in-

the yield. A new fisheries policy also is said to be in the offing. The

tensive technology to improve

policy will address, among other things, the question of lease period of state-owned inland fishing grounds. Experts feel that extension of lease period of these water bodies will induce the leasee to invest in the improvement of these fisheries which would allow for higher productivity and a stable

Perhaps, the country's some 48 (O square nautical miles of fis ing ground in the Hay of Bengal, offers tremendous scope for meeting he shortfall in domestic consumption requirements. This would also call for

growth of inland fish resources.

fishermen affected by the cyclone. At the noment, marine fish constitute ...ly 25 per cent of the country's total catch. Marine fishing ... ppears to be an under-exploited sector and offers high potential for further expansion. The eighth session of the Indian Ocean Fishery Commission and the 17th Advisory Committee meeting of Bay of Bengal Programme, held concurrently in Dhaka last April, also had brought this issue into focus.

Hopefully, the new fisheries policy will also address itself to the question of improving the lot of the fishermen. The oft re-

ALONG MY WAY

S B Chaudhuri

a change in our food habits. Our preferences are still heavily weighed in favour of freshwater fish. May be, the new policy could also aim at popularising consumption of sea fish Further, the new policy should provide for significant improvements in the logistical support for coastal fishing. There are indications available which suggest that there is scope for a more urgent handling of problems in the area. Reports have appeared in the press to the effect that the Japanese aided project for rehabilitation of constal fishermen affected the 1991 cyclone, is progressing rather slowly. Under this project, more than two thousand mechanised fishing boots are to be made available to the coastal

peated motto jaal jaar jola taur - fishing grounds belong to the nan who wields the fishing net — is mostly an empty slogan. In archate Bangla, fishermen were also known as jaladas, literally

- slaves of the water bodies. Now, they are slaves of the mahajans (money-lenders), aratdars (large traders and commission agents) and beparis/farias litinerant traders) too. In fact, the informal credit market operated by this class of lenders is usually the only source of funding fishermen. Fishermen are beholden to this class of creditors. They receive cash advances and have to sell their catch - usually to the farta - who, in his turn, would deliver the yield to the aratdar. Usually, no explic-

shortfall in domestic consumption requirements. This would also call for a change in our food habits. ity interest is charged in these transactions. However, the sale price for the fish would nor mally be dictated by the faria. Thus, the fisherman has to pay interest at an exorbitant rate alright, albeit, a hidden interest in the form of a grossly lower

Access to institutional fl

nance could take the fishermen out of the clutches of the informail money market operators However, the problem of furnishing adequate collateral for bank loans would crop up. Very iew among the fishermen own land or other fixed assets to offer as collateral. The boat or the net will be seen as a poor collat eral indeed! Perhaps, a special revolving fund could be created to guarantee loans, with contributions from the government, banks and the fishermen's or gantsations. Banks could then share the risk of lending to the lishermen. However, such a move would have to be supplemented by a new marketing arrangement to replace the existing chain operated by informal money market operators. Come to think of it, instead of climinating the informal money market in this sector, why not try to integrate it into the open economy? But, that is a tall order - a big move in itself.

The courses's fish resources also make proper contribution to export earnings. Export of shrimps alone could exceed Tk 600 crore this year. However, the problems of low productivity continues to plague inland shrimp cultivation. The yield per acre is only half of that in India and several times below some of the major exporting

countries, such as Taiwan. However, recent initiatives to raise the level of yield per acre, through application of 'semi-intensive' culture, are said to have shown encouraging results. Shrimp cultivation in coastal areas also cause ecological problems. Sea water has to be let in to grow shrimp in these areas. As a result, unless extra care is taken, the land loses its fertility due to salinity, rendering it unfit for raising any crop.

OW a days, I live in an area situated on the western outskirts of the city. Just about a mile away, there are fairly widespread wetlands, probably fed by a tributary of the nearby river Buriganga. Housing estates have laid sakes on most of the land. However, it would need a lot of earth-filling to build houses. So, for now at least, one can feast his eyes on a fairly wide expanse of vacant' land under an open sky. The monsoon rains have turned the area into a stretch of open water. A lot of fishing goes on now in the area - fishing-stands with the net attached to a triangular bamboo frame - the fisherman sitting in a small boat standing up from time to time to pull up the bamboo frame, gather the catch on the net into a bamboo container, then lower the contraption again into the water. The other day, I met a fisherman comfng ashore with his catch. A fairly good catch, it seemed to me. I asked him, 'will your family eat some of the fish?" He stared at me blankly 'Eat the fish,' he muttered, 'no, no, we can't afford fish - I will sell all of ft."

Russia: Yesterday's Apparatchiks are Today's Elite

HE ex-Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) is dead but its former members live on in the pages of a new comptlation of who's who in Russia - a testimony to how much and yet how little has changed since the 1991 attempted coup.

With the 1,500 short biographical sketches of Russia's leading politicians, businessmen, scholars and artists, the new 'Kto yest kto v Rossiya" (Who's Who in Russia) is currently the definite book on who will determine the future of a country in transit from communism to capitalism,

But the alphabetical listing also illustrates how deeply the roots of Russia's putative democracy lie in the old regime.

Indeed, most of the government, opposition and new business elite came to initial prominence through the communist

system. Most were placed in a position to exploit the new opportunities of 'democratic capitalism' by years of work within the old party network. And now yesterday's party apparatchiks are today's millionaires and

democrats. Critics have commented that

the rejection of communism was dictated not on ideological or moral grounds but by the quest for power, with Russian President Boris Yeltsin becoming the rallying point for a rechristened communist nomenklatura.

The logic of political struggle had made Yeltsin a 'democrat', something which conflicted with his authoritarian and potentially dictatorial nature," noted political analyst Boris Pugachev recently.

This camp of diehard survivors is still struggling against the 'neo-democratic nomenklatura' and hopeful Moseow liberals who also surrounded Yeltsin after the failed August 1991 coup.

Observing liberal distillusion with Yeltsin prior to the April referendum and the exodus of prominent figures like Georgy Arbatov, Galina Staravoitova and Yegor Yakovlev from the Yeltsin camp, Pugachev said,

"The philosophy of liberalism is not applicable to Russian politics since its original purpose was to destroy communism. Once that has been achieved, this philosophy works for the destruction of Russia itself."

At 55, Prime Minister Victor

The dead Communist Party of the Soviet Union lives on in new 'Who's Who'. Rajiv Tiwari of IPS reports from Moscow.



Chernomyrdin's background as a member of the CPSU central eommittee comes as no sur-prise. Today's democrats who are embarrassed by their CPSU links say membership was as necessary in the old days as the school tie.

Until three years ago, 35vear old Finance Minister Boris Fyodorov, currently feted in the West as the most radical reformer on the Yeltsin team, was a consultant in the socio-economic department of the CPSU central committee.

And 42-year old Deputy Prime Minister Alexander

Shokhin, another advocate of wholesale privatisation, accumulated years of experience in the former Soviet Union's state planning commission.

Like their previous leader Yegor Gaidar, who once wrote commentaries for the Pravda newspaper, Fyodorov, Shokhin, and the other beacons of reform share a bookish fascination with US economist Milton Friedman's supply side theories which have wreaked havoc in countries of the Third World.

Known for his canny personnel management skills

Yeltsin has since the middle of last year tried to curb the exuberance of Russia's radical re formers by recruiting hands on managers steeped in the Soviet

experience. Recently, Oleg Lobov was brought in at the same level as Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Shumetko and Oleg Soskovets has come in after the referendum at the same rank

The Shumeiko-Lobov-Soskovets triumvirate is said to contain all the ingredients Yeltsin needs during the crucial months ahead when he wants to push through a new constitution and restore control over the reeling economy.

Shumciko has influence with the powerful state sector bosses, Lobov - a former minister in the Soviet era - is an ex-CPSU regional heavyweight from Yeltsin's home town of Yekaterinburg (formerly Sveriovsk), and the newest appointee, Soskovets, has no desire to rock the market reform boat he has clambered on.

The sturdy and non-controversial Chernomyrdin presides over these three, ensuring a clean sweep for the ex-Soviet

But the conspicuous absence of radical reformers in the highest cabinet ranks is causing discomfort in the pro-reform

media, which says the "Na poleonic breadth" of Lobov's ambition will ensure the eclipse its own proteges.

Commented the Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper: 'The crisis of authority has reached a point where the most unexpected and, indeed, insignificant people come along in an attempt to grab power."

And the more sensational Moskovsky Komsomolets newspaper noted, "The spirit of Gaidar will soon evaporate from Staraya Ploshchad (the seat of Russian government) and Silayev's ministers ighosts from Yeltsin's past) will again take their place at the helm."

According to Pugachev, movement away from the heyday of liberalism during the first half of 1992 was inevitable. There is a basic dissimilarity between Yeltsin and the intellectual dissident liberals of the communist and post-communist era with whom the Russian leader - who rose through the ranks in the provinces - has

little in common. Said Pugachev: "Democratic government is visibly degenerating into a power struggle between the new elite and in the top ranks of political groups... As result, instead of an ascending process of creating a civil society, we see a descending

process of 'barbarisation'."

Bosnia and Islamic brotherhood

Sir, When we look around the world, we feel compelled to conclude that Muslims in the world are made to sink, day by day. They are subjected to human degradation, coercion and atrocities. What a pity, what a contrast - our past glory is be-

coming a forgotten tale! The question naturally arises what are the causative factors behind such degradation and downfall? The answer is perhaps, simple: First, the non-Muslims, particularly Jews, and also Christians, seem not to tolerate Muslims stronghold in any part of the world. They want to divide Muslims through subtile diplomacy. Secondly, we the Muslims are also responsible for such degradation. To a good extent, we have deviated from the path of Islam. We are

lacking in the spirit of Islam. What is happening in Bosnia is known to all. However, Bosnia was not a familiar name before the conflict. Bosnia-Herzegovina was one of the six states of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; others were Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro and Macedonia Among them only two now comprise the new Yugoslavia — Serbia and Montengro. Others have declared independence and since then ethnic fighting is going on in this part of former Yugoslavia.

In this terrible fighting thousands of Muslim men, women and children were killed in a rude fashion. Women were raped and molested indiscriminately. And this wanton atrocities are still going on. All efforts to stop the fighting ended in only advice, ultimatum, United Nations embargo.

The atrocities inflicted upon Bosnian Muslims will remain as the blackest chapter and one of the greatest tragedies in the history of mankind. Even Hitler has been put behind in this race of human oppression and coercion. Hunger, starvation,

disease have become the lot of the Muslims living there. The events in Bosnia and many other countries compel and to feel that a systematic programme is on to disintegrate, destabilise, even eliminate the

Muslims.

The role of world bodies in general and the UN in particular is a sort of mockery. It is playing a double standard when the case is of Muslims. It has lost its credibility. The deployment of UN troops in Bosnia appears as nothing but an eye wash, just to appease the Muslim countries. Considering the magnitude of the situation the Muslim states of the world must remain indifferent, complacent and stlent observer.

It is highly deplorable and shocking that in spite of all humiliations Muslims are yet to awaken from their deep slumber. They should rise above petty selfish interest and parochial politics and be imbued with the spirit of Islamic brotherhood. The sorrow and concern of any particular Muslim country should be the common sorrow and concern of all Muslims.

Nawshad Rahman Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Give us a good governance

Sir. Will some intelligent person inform the government that Bangladesh was one of the first to sign the UNESCO world treaty not to impoverish students by demanding a tax on foreign books for students. Now some politicians call for a tax against poor students for buying the foreign books they need for study!

Will the book dealers refuse absolutely to pay a tax on books, so that rich politicians can buy more cars and have bigger parties? Will some person inform the

students, just as Allah Himself did not create all brains in a uniform state. History should teach anybody that politicians should not interfere with the learning process - the sole concern of the family, the par-

ents of students Will somebody suggest for a decent Assembly and good governance?

Richard Conklin Islampur, Dhaka

Govt offices' performance report

Sir, The performance report of various government offices and public sector corporations are said to be submitted to the higher authorities concerned in such a manner as if those offices/organisations are discharging their duties and responsibilities very smoothly and efficiently without any lapses, omissions and negligence of duties, loss of time, energy and public money.

is it so? The functions and duties of various government offices and public sector corporations vary from each other and as such there is no prescribed proforma for submission of fortnightly/ monthly report. Moreover, there is no appropriate authority to examine and to scrutinise the reports. As such, the standard of services and the efficiency in the government offices and public sector corporations are bound to deteriorate and they are day by day.

With a view to streamlining and improving the works and functions of various government offices and public sector corporations, we strongly feel that regular accountability and transparency of their activities may be made in the interest of public service and also for the good of our hard earned democ-

We propose a draft, as folgood opposition that there is in lows, for a standard prescribed no country of the world a uniproforma of fortnightly/monthly form system of eduction for all report for all government offices

and public sector corporations for kind perusal and consideration of the government.

i) Period from....to..... ii) Number of receipts received for action iii) Number of receipts disposed of tv) Number of receipts (cases) pending v) Other activities ad-seriatim vi) Income, if any vii) Expenditure, if any viii) Remarks, if any.

We also suggest that Performance Committees duly constituted with public leaders, government servants and members of the public may be formed at different levels, national and district, to look into the performance of the government offices and public sector corporations and to advise the government on taking necessary

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203

Jalalabad Division

Sir, Sylhet has been a deprived area since its inclusion in the then eastern part of Pakistan in 1947 through a referendum. The people of Sylhet voted in favour of Pakistan and thus deserved a special status but in reality it got nothing. Much hope was given by Khwaja Nazimuddin to obtain the vital support of the Sylheti MLA's to become the first Chief Minister of East Bengal but the result was a big

Now the people of Sylhet are desiring to have a Division of their own — Jalalabad Division. Only recently Barisal has been made a Division. We do not question the merit of Barisal to be a Division but it is also fact that Sylhet does not lack any merit to become so. Sylhet is the richest area in the country in consideration of natural resources. It is the biggest foreign exchange earner. Then why our democratic government should not concede to our demand for a Division?

A B Chowdhury Mohammadpur, Dhaka

OPINION

Computer Literacy

I have gone through the Star Computer Special (July 15), and am jotting down some ideas.

BCC: This Government agency called the Bangladesh Computer Council has to work in high profile to attract the attention of all concerned, and not work like a bureaucratic government office or a training

It was not clear from reading of the transcript how much the BCC and the private sector work in co-ordination and cooperate for mutual benefit; and whether the Advisory Council of BCC has representatives from all the relevant sectors. For example, have the T&T, FCCI and other chambers ever took notice of the BCC, or vice versa? The availability of any literature or magazine is not advertised.

What is the status of the BCC officially? How seriously are its recommendations and proposals treated at policy-making level? What efforts have been made so far to declare computerization as a thrust area? In the absence of a Science and Technology Ministry, which Ministry or Division is looking after this ultramodern baby? Why the policy makers, who speak publicly on all subjects on earth, never mention concrete proposals on the extensive use of computers in Bangladesh? Other issues, such as export, family planning, are hammered at us almost daily.

It is time BCC came up with a publicity campaign, starting with a series of video tapes for creating awareness, for screening at planned targets. The politicians, the MPs, and the misinformed Union leaders may not be left out. This information and orientation exercise will have no meaning without the

announcement of a firm national policy on how the country

can benefit from IT. MARKETING: For population, computers and software must be available freely in large numbers. Distributing imported machines in thousands cannot be an economic solution for supply to offices, schools and colleges. Local assembly (including that of fax machines) is a must, backed up with fully trained after-sale service. The EPZs should be used for mass production/assembly.

Sizeable ADP allocations have to be made, to encourage the donor agencies to come in with expertise, and foreign exchange component, in the private, public and the academic

The advantage with India is that a large percentage of the computer experts in the USA are Indians. With this highly credible front-profile, it is much easier to do export business, using the cheap production centres in India. How to induce the Bangladeshi experts abroad is one of the exercises.

T&T: The T&T has to play the vital role of providing ultra fast communication services to the users of computers. An integrated policy is called for. The pity is that the Ministers hardly touch on the hi-tech issues facing the country - this country of common people, run by the common people. It all sounds very democratic and patriotic, but who are going to do the donkey's work?

The get-together arranged by Star is highly commendable, and has spotlighted an important sector of development. How sensitive is the government's monitoring system - without the use of the computer?