

Solidarity for Nation Building

The national revolution and solidarity day will be observed in the country today, as it has been since 1975. The events of the day, eighteen years ago, was triggered by a coup attempt by Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf started on 3rd November, which was in turn launched as a protest against the earlier army putsch of August 1975 in which Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was murdered along with his whole family. Khaled Mosharraf, in his attempt to capture power, put the then Chief of the Army Staff General Ziaur Rahman, under house arrest and had himself appointed in Zia's place. While Khaled Mosharraf was trying to consolidate his position, retired Col. Taher, who had established a foothold among army soldiers (jawans) with populist views like abolishing differences between officers and soldiers and creating a people's army, was organising a counter move to overturn Mosharraf's attempt and establish his own brand of politics in the country. On the early morning of 7th November 1975, under the slogan of 'Sipahi Biplob' Col. Taher was able to mobilize a section of the soldiers, whose first job was to release General Zia from house arrest and restore his command.

In the meantime, a section of the misguided jawans turned Taher's slogan of abolishing officer-soldier differences into a personal crusade of vengeance and settling old scores which led to the brutal killing of some officers including a lady doctor of the army medical corp. This and several other incidents of indiscipline and anarchy turned the just released Gen. Ziaur Rahman against whatever Col. Taher's 'Sipahi Biplob' stood for. Using his popularity among the common soldiers Gen. Zia took command of the situation and brought order and discipline to a situation which was deteriorating extremely fast. Gen. Zia declared himself as the deputy martial law administrator, retaining Justice Sayem as the President. Zia's role during his first few days in power showed a tremendous capacity for leadership and a rare vision which greatly helped to create an immediate sense of acceptability for him. His dismantling of the one-party system and restoration of multi-party politics reflected peoples' aspiration and was greeted with all round approval. His step of releasing the privately owned print media back to their original owners and restoring as much freedom of the press as was possible under a martial law regime, was another of the move that earned Gen. Zia a lot of goodwill.

His swift action against the indiscipline in the army and the restoration of the chain of command then, saved the armed forces from total chaos and anarchy. Under egalitarian slogans, Col. Taher was demolishing the fundamental command structure of the forces and destroying the very soul of the army, which is discipline.

As we observe the national revolution and solidarity day, we would like to reiterate our view, expressed on earlier occasions, that our revolution of today should be in the area of development, and our solidarity must be for a vision of the future, far removed from negativism and divisiveness that marks our politics of the day. It should dawn on everybody that there is no way of paying respect to whoever is our hero, but by developing the country. If we want to show how farsighted and visionary Gen. Zia's leadership was, then let us do everything in our power to remove poverty from the face of this country. Nothing can be a greater tribute to him. No amount of slogan chanting, or sponsored newspaper articles, supplements or other mass media programmes can ever match the power and impact of concrete actions.

Co-operative Effort

So far as the ritual and festivities are concerned, there was no dearth of them yesterday on the occasion of the observance of the National Co-operatives Day. Rhetorics and pledges too were aplenty. But the problem with such occasions is that not many even do know what all the festivities and gaieties are for. And yet nobody in his right senses can deny the virtues of very many such national and international days. The regrettable fact is that bereft of substances, such occasions are reduced to mere superficial colours and gaieties. As if those fanfares are a substitute for the practical task painstakingly performed throughout the year.

That our co-operative movement is in a shamble is undeniable. A series of setbacks it suffered in the past few years has indeed helped little to sustain people's confidence in the virtue of the movement. But in the very terminology lies the promise of a gainful co-operation and indeed once the prospect of the forgotten enterprise looked bright and immensely rewarding. What started happening then is anybody's nightmare: corruption, about-turn policies and lack of social commitment — all conspired together to bring the co-operative movement down to the dust. The blunder began to gain ground when the entire nation was looking for a short-cut to the neglect of collective — no matter bit by bit — savings and judicious investment. The demise of COSCOR, a co-operative venture, best illustrates the point. Its top management made it to fall apart through mismanagement and misappropriation of fund.

The shock was not only too much for this enterprise alone but also for the movement itself in the country. However, this gloomy picture in the public sector co-operative effort, could not completely overwhelm similar spirits in the private sector often with encouragement and support from the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), now renamed Private Voluntary Development Organisations (PVDOs). Whether the clicking of co-operatives in the private sector gave any cause for the national planners to keep their hands off from this important area is not known. What, however, can be realised is that the co-operative spirit today is at its lowest and still ebbing. Any co-operative scheme requires immense patience and deft steering through rough times.

Of the many reasons why the co-operatives could not spread their roots in our society, the one that figures prominently is our budgetary incompatibility. Admittedly, savings as a social practice has never been a strong point of ours. In the absence of any fail-safe warranty, the little virtue we find in the effort simply gets dissipated. At a time when nations in the West are in quest of a collective way — like the European Community — to meet their socio-economic needs, there are not many options for any group of people other than collectively addressing the problems facing it. Many of the NGOs have done quite an admirable — and timely — job by initiating their target groups to the co-operative efforts with considerable success. But the isolated efforts need to be coordinated through a well-devised mechanism. The government policy on this must be clearly spelled out. Co-operative societies prosper when their funds are wisely invested for creating more national wealth.

Elections in Pakistan in the Eye of a Bangladeshi Observer

by Enayetullah Khan

Another striking aspect of this election is that, besides helping to crystallize the politics of Pakistan into two-party system, it has completely routed splinter groups and parties as well as the fundamentalist ones that have been thriving in that country by trading on religion. The tragic predicament of Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami, which has suffered a total catastrophe in the poll, is a case in point. Three Jamaatites with great difficulty managed to struggle their way to the parliament, not on Jamaat's ticket but on PIF nominations.

THE elections held in Pakistan early last month, at an estimated expenditure of a staggering one billion dollars stir up a question in most minds in South Asian countries today, if they can give Pakistan internal peace and political stability, so vitally necessary to set her on the road to progress and prosperity. As they are, the elections-1993, have culminated in rather weak government and very powerful opposition in Islamabad and in two important provinces namely the Punjab and Sindh. The outcome of this poll is in complete reversal of the electoral tradition of this country. That is the reason why Pakistan watchers in Bangladesh and elsewhere in South Asia are turning sceptic about the result of this poll.

The polling, which is universally acclaimed as the fairest with no interference or effort at rigging from any quarters, has proved beyond doubt that there is no national party as such in Pakistan which yields support equally in all her four provinces to form governments there as well as at the centre on its own strength.

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), which is being led by late Zulifkari Ali Bhutto's Oxford-educated daughter, Benazir, managed to capture 86 seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan, while Pakistan Muslim League of Mian Nawaz Sharif (PML-N) bagged 72 seats to emerge as runners-up in this race for power.

The seats captured by the two major parties bring to light inability of either of them to form government at the centre on its own strength. PPP has formed government at the centre with the support of its electoral ally PML (I) and other splinter groups and independent candidates. Interestingly enough, the third largest group

consisting of 15 members is formed by the Independents. PML(N) tried in vain to muster support of splinter groups parties and independent candidates to form the government in Islamabad.

The failure of both the parties to form government on their own strength points unmistakably to the incontrovertible fact that neither enjoys mass support and confidence equally in all the four provinces. Despite populist image of Pakistan People's Party which perpetuates the Bhutto legend, people refused to give it a clean walkover to power. They have given PPP 866 seats in the National Assembly to enable it in forming the national government with the support of the splinter groups and independents. The fact that PML (N) has bagged 72 seats is reflective of the popular desire for a strong and effective opposition to serve as a check and balance in the parliament. It is interesting to take note of the reason for the electoral reverse suffered by this party. Although PML (N) has done well in urban centres, particularly in Punjab, largely due to generous fund siphoned out to voters by industrial barons and big business magnates, beneficiaries of his regime, it has failed to make a dent in vast rural society, mainly because of the financial bungling in terms of crores of rupees it is accused of on the plea of setting up rural cooperatives in the Punjab. Nawaz is basically ur-

ban based political leader who has little appeal in rural Pakistan.

Thus the election-1993, clearly signifies aversion of the electorate in Pakistan against delegating sweeping power to one party which, as has happened in the past, degenerates into worst form of dictatorship. Conversely, it manifests their favorable disposition to two-party system — one in the government and the other in the opposition to exercise effective restraint on the party-in-power.

Another striking aspect of this election is that, besides helping to crystallize the politics of Pakistan into two-party system, it has completely routed splinter groups and parties as well as the fundamentalist ones that have been thriving in that country by trading on religion. The tragic predicament of Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami, which has suffered a total catastrophe in the poll, is a case in point. Three Jamaatites with great difficulty managed to struggle their way to the parliament, not on Jamaat's ticket but on PIF nominations.

The election result, therefore, implies clearly growing political maturity of the electorate in Pakistan. In Pakistani society, which is essentially feudal in character, landlords, industrial and big business bring their influence to bear on the electoral process in its every step. In remote inaccessible parts of the country, voters find it extremely difficult to overcome

tribal and clannish pulls and pressures and exercise their right of franchise freely without threats of intimidation and coercion.

A noteworthy aspect of the just concluded poll in Pakistan is that the armed forces, which have been playing predominant role in the politics of that country right from its outset, have remained completely detached from the process of electioneering. They were on duty only to ensure free and fair polling without any violence or interference from any quarters. But they never interposed at any stage. This insular attitude of the military not only contributed to the free and fair polling, but also encouraged voters to turn out in larger numbers and cast their votes for the candidates of their own choice freely. As a matter of fact, it was due to presence of the armed forces that the polling was fair and peaceful. Thus, for a Bangladeshi observer or, for that matter, for an observer from any South Asian country, the election-1993 in Pakistan provides a refreshing contrast with her past electoral tradition which has all along been marked by violence, unwarranted interference and glaring effort at rigging.

The two-party system, as has emerged from the heat and dust of the election-1993, is the result of popular will. The two-party system, it must be noted, can work only on the basis of patient negotiation on points of differences, tolerance and coop-

eration and not on intolerance and confrontation between the government and the opposition. The two major parties namely, PPP and PML (N), must bear it in mind that they will run counter to the electoral verdict of the people, if they try to wreck it by treading the path of hostility, confrontation and intolerance.

Soon after the election Benazir Bhutto told this writer, who had been to Pakistan during the election at the invitation of the government of Pakistan, that she would like to see in the Parliament a strong opposition which, she thought, was a *sin quo non* for the healthy growth and smooth functioning of democracy. Confident of success in executing her pre-election pledges, Benazir hoped the opposition would extend its unstinted support and cooperation to her move to introduce democratic reforms in the constitution. Both Benazir and Nawaz Sharif suffered the presidential excesses and therefore, the two leaders from the two sides of the fences should come up and ungrudgingly cooperate with each other in amending the constitution to democratize it and thereby, give birth to a truly sovereign parliament.

Benazir's post-election statement urging cooperation with the opposition clearly indicates that she has mellowed down to maturity which she is expected to display in taking lead to strengthen the foundation of democracy at home, as also in

dealing with the Hazratbal crisis which she is confronted with on her assumption of office as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. The deepening Hazratbal crisis, which is causing further deterioration in the already strained Indo-Pakistan relations is going to cast its shadow on the proposed talks between the two countries suggested by the Indian Prime Minister Narashima Rao.

The United States' latest pronouncement questioning the validity of Kashmir's accession to India and New Delhi's reaffirmation of its position declaring in unequivocal terms, that Kashmir is an integral part of India, are going to make things infinitely more difficult for Benazir in the coming months. The United States' pro-Pakistan tilt is certain to help boot up this certain of Harvard educated Prime Minister at home. But that will conversely, make it immensely more difficult for her to deal with Indians. How will she dribble through this winding maze and try to ease the current Indo-Pakistan tension without deviating from Pakistan's principled stand on Kashmir are yet to be seen. At any cost, Benazir requires peace and tension-free relationship with India to divert her attention to the development of national economy, which has suffered during the past few months, and to strengthening the base of democracy at home.

The author, who is Chief Editor UNB, visited Pakistan as an observer during election at the invitation of the government of Pakistan.

NOTICE
Due to his travel abroad, the regular column 'On the Record', by Shah A M S Kibria will not be published for the next two weeks. The column will reappear on his return.

THE most important thing about the Jordanian general election is that it is taking place at all.

Pressure for postponement began to build in late August when the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Israel reached agreement in Oslo on self-rule for the Palestinians in the occupied territories and Israeli troop withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the town of Jericho in the West Bank.

The signing of the PLO-Israeli accord on September 13 plunged King Hussein into two weeks of indecision.

He wanted to press ahead with the democratisation programme he initiated four years ago when Jordan held its free and fair general election.

Influential politicians loyal to the king were, however, urging him to postpone the election arguing that it would turn into a referendum on the PLO-Israeli accord rather than a true consultation of the Jordanian electorate.

Postponement was also supported by secularists who feared that the Islamic Action Front would capture the votes of Palestinian refugees who opposed the accord as a 'sell out'.

Since the king had made it clear that Palestinians wishing to vote in local elections in the occupied territories scheduled for next July would not be permitted to vote in the Jordanian poll, those in favour of postponement argued that the polls should be simultaneous.

On September 28, two days before the election campaign was due to begin, Hussein surprised his kingdom by deciding to keep to the timetable. By holding the election precisely four years after the last, Jordan enhanced the credibility of its democratisation process.

His decision pleased secularists who believed Jordanians

Jericho Deal Dominates Jordan Election

Michael Jansen writes from Nicosia

King Hussein took his country by surprise by deciding to go ahead with Jordanian election on schedule. Twenty parties have registered, this being the first election since 1957 in which political parties are permitted to stand. As Gemini News Service reports, campaigning has centred on the PLO-Israeli deal and Palestinians, who form the majority in the kingdom, are concerned about their future.



KING HUSSEIN

Party time and Palestinians were politically mature enough to vote responsibly at a time of change, and the Islamic Action Front, dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, the largest party in the outgoing parliament.

The election to be held on November 8, will be the first since 1957 in which political parties are permitted to stand. In 1989 candidates stood as independents, although they were allowed to be listed in groups known to be affiliated with one party or another.

Under a new party law 20 parties have registered, includ-

ing communists, capitalists, Islamists and tribal coalitions. Still, the majority of the 555 candidates contesting the 80 seats in the lower house are again standing as independents.

This is because Jordanians distrust political parties, regarding them as either mouthpieces of the monarchy or opponents bent on its overthrow. There is still no concept of independent-minded loyalists operating in competition with a loyal opposition.

Furthermore, Jordanians consider party politicians dishonest and corrupt while they believe that committed independents are more prepared to provide services to their constituents. As a result less than two per cent of registered voters joined parties once they were legalised.

The major parties fielding official candidates are the Islamic Action Front which has put forward 36, the largest number, and the Democratic and Popular Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine and the communists which have nominated three each.

Other parties are mainly clan or tribally based. The overwhelming presence of conservative Islamic, business and tribal elements has discouraged women from entering the race — only three are standing in this election while 12 stood and

lost in 1989. One of the most colourful women to put herself forward then and again this time is Toujan al-Faisal, a television presenter.

Slogans and electioneering are more subdued than in 1989. The issues before the voters then were the collapse of the Jordanian currency and economic crisis. Voters today must deal with a whole range of political issues which they find confusing and frightening. In response candidates have adopted a sober approach.

The issue at the forefront is the peace process and the PLO-Israeli accord. Depending on whether voters are for or against it, Jordanians of Palestinian origin, more than half the population, must decide where they belong while Jordanian nationalists must work out a new relationship to the Palestinians living in Jordan. On this relationship depends a future Jordanian-Palestinian confederation spanning the Jordan River.

Turn-out of voters will be a crucial factor in the outcome, as it was in 1989. Then only about 40 per cent of the eligible voters bothered to go to the polling booths, the majority of them Islamists committed to the platform of the Brotherhood.

Non-voters generally secular and liberal, had little faith in the democratisation process and did not believe that the king, who rules rather than

reigns, would hand over power to the parliament. The secularists' abstention gave the Brotherhood and its allies 26 seats.

The Brotherhood, registered as a religious and charitable movement, also had the advantage of being permitted to operate as a political party at a time when parties were still banned. Tribal candidates secured 20 seats and Arab nationalists and leftists won 15.

The Brotherhood may not, however, have these advantages in this poll. Jordanian analysts argue that it has not augmented its constituency in the past four years because of the poor performance of its ministers and deputies. More recently, they say, Islamist opposition to the

PLO-Israeli accord has alienated the 60 per cent of Jordanians of Palestinian origin who support the accord.

Because secular political parties are not in a position to challenge the Brotherhood in this election, the only way the Islamists can be checked will be for secularists, who are a majority in the country, to participate heavily in the poll. If voter turnout is high, over 60 per cent, the Islamists could be reduced to 15 seats while if turnout is low they could take as many as 30.

This poll is being closely watched by countries like Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates, who abominate democratisation, and by semi-democratic states, like Egypt and Tunisia, where Islamist groupings present a challenge to the government.

If secular electors committed to democracy vote in strength to reduce the number of Islamist seats in parliament, the democratisation process will be given a boost in the Middle East and the entire Muslim world.

MICHAEL JANSEN has covered the Middle East for many years.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Taka convertibility

Sir, The much talked about introduction of 'open Taka convertibility' has been deferred twice. This proves the lack of expertise, authenticity and confidence of the authorities concerned on this vital financial policy decision.

Undoubtedly the 'open Taka convertibility' is quite a new subject for us all. We never underwent such a monetary exercise in the practical field.

Despite various foreign exchange regulations and restrictions, for loopholes thereof and also on account of 'Hundi system', much of our country's wealth, from time to time, has been secretly smuggled out. What would happen if we really start 'open Taka convertibility'? We feel that a poor and 'least developed country' like ours cannot afford 'open Taka convertibility'. It may make our country totally bankrupt.

No foreign exchange control may be good for giant exporting countries like the USA, Japan, Korea or Singapore but it may cause immense harm to a country like Bangladesh having

deficit foreign trade for years together.

If we have a foreign exchange reserve of US dollar 2.4 billion today it is not because we are earning foreign exchange by exporting our goods and commodities but it is due to taking of loans by us from various foreign countries and agencies.

We observe with surprise and shock that only a handful of bureaucrats, business magnates and industrialists are singing in praise of Taka convertibility and majority of the people are keeping silent.

We feel it would be more wise and better if we totally give up the idea of 'open Taka convertibility' and instead introduce free import of gold which would be more useful, beneficial and advantageous to our country.

O J Kabir
Dhaka-1203

Sylhet municipal roads

Sir, Sylhet is a big Pourashava (municipality). It is more resourceful than most of the Pourashavas of the country.

Despite this, its road maintenance is very poor. Roads even in the heart of the town like Bandar Bazar Road, Zinda Bazar Road and many others beggar description. This is mainly due to apathy of the Pourashava management. They are not at all concerned about maintenance of the roads and cleanliness of the town. The whole town is giving a dirty look and there is no sign that municipal authorities will give up their lethargy and inaction.

It is high time that the government should supersede the Pourashava and take over the administration directly for two or three years to inculcate efficiency, speed and discipline in Pourashava administration of the town.

Saleh Ahmed Choudhury
Fulbari, Sylhet

Coastal passenger vessels

Sir, The latest launch tragedy in Bhola off-shore island once again brings into focus two pending projects which are not getting higher priority, resulting in loss of lives. One is the formation of a Coast Guard network; and the other is to review the hull design of coastal vessels carrying passengers.

The river motor launches are not suitable for plying in the coastal areas. No serious step has been taken for mass production of coastal passenger vessels of suitable design (many prototype designs are available

worldwide for study/demonstration). The local shipyards are quite capable of designing and building a couple of small vessels for pilot study.

Travelling on the waterways needs strict implementation of safety rules. The River Police is also not much in evidence. In a deltaic region, these services have to be built up fast, especially when these are also cyclone areas.

Another neglected aspect is that the number of vessels plying daily is not enough for the prevailing density of population/passengers, resulting in constant overcrowding/overloading. The civic sense has not yet developed to the stage of relying on self-regulatory practices. The supply-and-demand ratio has to be respected and recognised to ensure safe journeys.

These activities should go on in the background in a routine manner, away from the newspaper headlines. There is a tendency to be noisy with small matters in the political publicity campaigns indulged in, in the name of government activity. It neither benefits nor impresses anybody. The government is expected to work in a quiet and systematic manner, informing the public from time to time on issues of public interest. Frolicking with trivialities and credit-seeking postures are not the signs of good governance.

A Mawas
Dhaka

OPINION

Investment and ICB Affairs

Shahabuddin Mahtab

Bangladesh has one of the lowest investment: GDP ratio in the world. The country cannot be at a take off point, unless the domestic savings is at least ten per cent of the GDP.

Concerning Bangladesh, it is being repeatedly said in the different forums by the concerned ministers and also by our Prime Minister himself that all opportunities, concessions etc. are being offered to the foreign investors to come to Bangladesh. One pertinent question that is being asked by the foreign investors is, if the going is so good, why the Bangladeshi investors at home and abroad are not investing in their own country? How do we have foreign investment, when the very first duty of the government is not being fulfilled? The foreign investor does require the safety and security of his life and property. The government has declared that there will be only 'one stop service' for the investors. But what is the actual scenario? An entrepreneur going to set up an industry is being fleeced at every stage. He has first to 'donate' to the extended hands from the very beginning. Not one, but hundreds of journeys have to be made, though the government policy is 'one stop service'. What is happening in a resource poor country like Vietnam? The foreign investors are vying to invest there. As of now the per capita incomes of Vietnam and Bangladesh are quite close to one another. But in a few years time, Vietnam is going to be another 'Asian tiger'.

What is needed now is to act, and stop all rhetorics. Shall we be able to do it? The farmers and the labour in our country are hard working and sincere. They need guidance and leadership.

Let us be very clear about one thing. Good governance and management is also dependent on personal integrity and discipline, a vision for the future, a grasp for what is essential and

possible, and a respect for fundamental values of life. Nothing will come to our aid, if we cannot meet the very essence of truth.

Now we may turn to another issue which concerns the middle class savers. Whatever this class of people have, they try to invest in the Post Office or the government controlled investment Corporation of Bangladesh. In the mid-eighties the ICB was declaring very high rates of dividends for its units. But the so called dividends were totally artificial. The Unit funds were invested in the shares of the different companies, and at that time the public limited companies were hardly earning any profit.

About twenty thousand people opened investors' account with the ICB, with the hope that the hard earned money of the small investors will be invested in good companies. The people's trust was due to the fact that the Ministry of Finance was overseeing its activities, and also that the Board of Directors of the ICB were appointed by the Government.

But what happened, in fact, was that the small investors' money was 'invested' in all losing and worthless companies leading to the huge losses of the investors. A share which was not even worth Tk. 300/00, was purchased for Tk. 1000/00. Shares have also, reportedly, been purchased for non-existent companies (Magura Textiles). In simple terms, the poor investors' money was plundered. What was the Board of Directors doing all the time, and the Ministry of Finance also? Who were the people, who did all the bungling? What has happened to them? What action has been taken against all concerned? Are the losses recoverable, from the persons concerned? We would urge upon the government to present the full facts to the nation, if it genuinely desires for the industrial development of this country.