Dhaka, Sunday, May 29, 1994

The New Phase in Dhaka-Hanoi Ties

The opening of a new chapter in the relationship between Hanoi and Dhaka by virtue of the v. isit to Dhaka by the Vietnamese Foreign Minister Ne uyen Manh Cam bears more significance than me ets the eye at first. For Dhaka's part it signifies the addition of a new element to her foreign policy directions after traversing all the known turfs in the neighbourhood. We are now looking eastward beyond Myanmar to expand the base for economic cooperation rightfully because Bangladesh has a bridgehead towards Southeast Asia. And the country that is a natural choice for Bangladesh obviously is Vietnam, being physically. historically and mentally close to her. There are reasons for Elanoi as well to be casting a friendly glance at Dhaka which also has a bridgehead towards South As.ia.

The contemporary perspective is favourable to more meaningful ties between Dhaka and Hanoi. Politically Hanoi's relations with the USA and China have normalised with an attendant potential developing for enormous economic benefits to her. She has an open mind now with a lot of enthusiasm to be a part and parcel of the political and economic processes which are in full motion both regionally and internationally. In the economic sphere Hanoi is wedded to the concept of free market which has actually been bolstered lately with an increasing dose of Direct Foreign Investment (FDI). So, Dhaka and Hanoi can exchange notes on economic reforms gaining immensely from each other's practical experiences. This should be possible in spite of the fact that they are apparently competitors when it comes to attracting potential foreign investments and the garments sales abroad. The reason why we say this is that there are complementarities between the two economies. One of Vietnam's priorities is the development and renovation of its infrastructure, a sphere in which she is likely to utilise a substantial portion of the foreign capital flowing into the country. Bangladeshi entrepreneurs have shown keen interest in this field, as the Vietnamese Foreign Minister himself has stated. Just as Hanoi can apply our experiences in her developinioni programmes we too can gain from its indigenous expertise in certain fields. The scope for exchange of knowledge in agriculture is limitless. If Bangladesh is a fertile delta formed by three rivers, the Red River and Mekong deltas of Vietnam form the rice bowl of the country.

We can supply Vietnam with consumer and intermediate goods of a large variety. Although imports from Hanoi to Bangladesh have been meagre compared with what Bangladesh has been exporting to that country, the entire volume of twoway traffic of goods, we believe, can be vastly increased in the near future.

'The accord on economic, scientific and technological cooperation has identified areas of collaboration such as commerce, fishery, irrigation, agriculture and health care. Our success in the immunity programme may be of interest to Viet-

But in the light of the still changing complexion of the regional and international relationships what deserves a particular mention is the accord reached between Dhaka and Hanoi to have regular consultations in international affairs and to work together for the promotion of international peace and stability. Both being non-aligned countries, one may read a conventional meaning into this understanding but unless two countries felt quite close to each other they wouldn't have expressed such an intent jointly.

Let the impetus to the bilateral ties be not a one-time affair, allowed to dissipate with the passage of time, for any lack of continuous follow-up. The spurt in the bilateral relations needs to be seriously built upon and not left to vagaries of

time to peter out.

Disturbing Development

Recently Bangladesh has achieved top spots in a few areas. But opviously we would rather not like to boast such records. One such record made public was the highest population concentration in the country among the nations in the world. Even the runner-up, in fact, a distant second has almost half as much population per square kilometre. This time, a UN survey report has it that Bangladesh has the highest urban growth in Asia. An annual growth of five per cent in city popu

lation could mean anything but progress. The report is quite explicit that the massive migration of rural people to urban centres has nothing to uo with their employment in city factories or offices. Nor does it signify urban development in physical and material terms. The conclusive thing is that the migration is not induced by a sudden spurt in industrialisation or in the growth of the formal sector as a whole.

What does then all this mean? The message is unmistakable. Villages are no longer able to keep the people by providing them with the means of survival. Cities and towns still offer some job opportunities -notwithstanding the poor wages and hardships - for the migrant workers from villages. A daily pittance is better than no income and no work for days, and, at times, months together. So, the one-way migration is continuing in the absence of any pragmatic and effective

poverty alleviation programme. What emerges from the report is that the tall claims by the government and some non-government organisations stand in stark contradiction with the reality. Billions of Taka have been poured into programmes often dubbed as innovative, pragmatic and people-oriented. But the results so far seem to have fallen far short of what should have been at least modestly achieved. A reappraisal of the models and policies

should, of necessity, be in order. We have time and again comphasised the need for creating a production base in villages through a happy blending between agriculture and industry. Small-scale, these agro-industries could be the right answer to the problem of rural exodus towards cities and towns. The important thing is to make the rural economy strong through more production and greater income-generation. Related to them is the raising of people's purchasing power. Both the government and the NGOs ought to concentrate on this point and they must do so in a disciplined and coordinated manner,

not like the way they are doing now. In the same breath it should be noted that the people by whose labour the city's service sectors mostly run are the most deprived. Slums, where these people live in, can be provided with some minimum facilities and amenities so that their health and hygiene are not grossly compromised.

The Daily Star Public Debate

The Proposition is: Should the Next General Elections be Held under a Caretaker Government?

ISTORICALLY, we never Rashed Khan Menon, MP and General Secretary, Worker's had a trout le-free elec-Party of Bangladesh argues in favour of the proposition. Interviewed by Sharier Khan

L L tion. It was invariably preceded by a mass movement. From the Pakistani days we have been fighting for various causes. First, we have been fighting for the right to vote. Then for the sanctity of the election process and for adult

The election of 1970 had been free and fair. But the then establishment did not accept the results. After the independence, the nation expected a free and fair election in 1973. But the ruling party manipulated the results. The same thing happened to the '79's referendum. My personal experience of the 1973 and 1979 elections was not totally positive. I won both the elections from my constituency in Barisal. The man who contested against me in 1973 congratulated me with a garland on the election night for my victory. Two days lafer, the tables turned and the radio announced my contestant, the winner, and as such, the MP.

In the 79 polls, results of three unions under my constituency were blocked for as late as 2 and following the election. Luckily, with the sympathetic help of the local authority - the results were released late in the night and I won. But after the announcement of the result, some people from the NSI started probing into the poll result. I sought the help of the then Speaker who intervened with the NSI and stopped them from proceeding into the affair. The term "vote dacoity" originated from 1986 elections. The 1988 election was even worse. An MP of that time told me that they had to throw away ballots, as they nu mbered more than there were actual voters from the area -- such was the extent of false voting.

So, we have a rich history of turnishing the sanctity of election and tampering with people's right to vote. The demand of a caretaker government is not very new. When Ershad first declared to hold

election, we (the five-party alliance) refused to cooperate with him. We demanded his resignation first. In 1987, the five-party alliance put forward the idea of a caretaker government. We said, the caretaker government will be headed by an institution, not a person. So we suggested, the Chief Justice would be suitable

During the 1990 upsurge. this idea became popular. During this period, I suggested in a joint meeting of the three

alliances that provision of a

caretaker government should

be inserted into the Constitu

time allowing us to hold elec-

tions under such a machinery

But the idea was immedi-

ately rejected by the Awami

League (AL) which felt sure to

win the ensuing polls. BNP was

at first hesitant regarding this

proposal, but ultimately it ac-

cepted the idea! Subsequently

to all parties as a member of

the Special Parliamentary

Committee for Constitutional

Amendment to introduce the

But all parties, excepting

parliamentary system of gov-

Jamaat rejected, the idea.

Moudud Ahmed, Salam

Talukder and Abdus Samad

Azad, clearly said no to this

idea. But the irony of fate is

this, now Jatiya Party and

Awami League are in the first

row, demanding a caretaker

government. Just imagine,

even during the last days of

Ershad, JP leader Moudud

ernment in 1991.

also made the same proposal

for atleast two or three times.

tion for a certain period of

for the job.

Ahmed described this idea on BTV, as unconstitution al. I believe, the right to vote is still the big question. This should be handled properly. Because the bourgeois parties take people for granted, and take the advantage of being in power, for staying in power.

So we must change the existing system which has been! destroyed by Ershad. He destroyed the backbone of the Election Commission as well as that of the election officials. So far, in the history of

Bangladesh two elections had

been fair. One in '70 — under a

sort of caretaker government

and the other in '91 — again

under a caretaker government

entirely depends on political

consensus. In both these cases

- there were, by and large, a

political consensus. But in case

of election under the party in

power, the opposition will face

taker government is not the ul-

timate point. Our aim should be

focussed on an independent Elec-

tion Commission. The present

Constitution gives a lot of power

to the EC, but not as much as is

needed. In the recent mayoral

elections, the EC failed to do any-

thing against the candidates for

CEC is a fine person. But in the

last two elections (mayoral and

Magura-2), the two major par

ties did not let him play his

role properly. This might hap-

a caretaker government ac-

The people find the idea of

pen in the future as well.

As a person, I believe, the

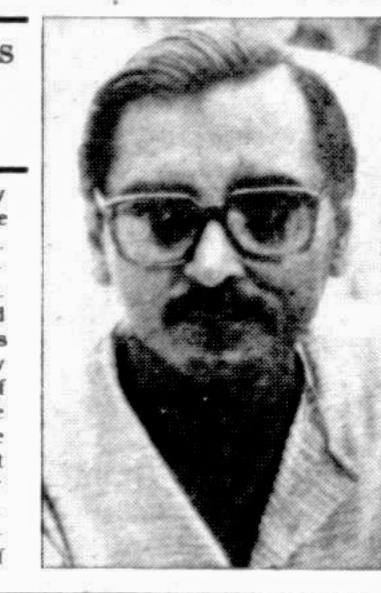
violation of election rules.

But the question of a care-

serious problems.

The fairness of polls results

ceptable because the memory of elections held under Justice Shahabuddin is still fresh. People liked him. They responded to what he asked for. When Shahabuddin first asked people to submit licenseless arms to the government, many laughed. But a huge quantity of arms were surrendered to the government in the end. Since people know in advance what 'will be the role of a caretaker government, they would respond likewise. They will cooperate with such a form of



The BNP in its efforts to brush away the demand for a caretaker government has on several occasions said that the by-elections held under the present government had been free and fair. I believe, it is ridiculous to compare a by-election with national level MP elections. During a by-election, leaders of all the parties remain on guard, and stay in the polling constituency. During the general elections, it is not possible. Even with all the leaders of different parties on guard during a by-election, there can be conflicts.

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The Magura election had been crucial for the nation. It has affected the credibility of the country's election process. A free and fair election process had been earned through a nine-vear-long struggle, to topple Ershad's autocratic regime. The AL could have won the Magura election or the BNP. That is not the point The point is the creclibility of the system. There is no constitutional problem regarding the caretaker government although Moudud Ahmed once tried to convince the nation that it was not possible constitutionally. If we all agree on the issue, we can add this provision to the Constitution. It is as simple as that. Even if we have some loopholes in the Constitution, the MPs will discuss the issue and bring about the necessary changes.

But tell me, why is the BNP so touchy about the caretaker government? It is being as touchy as the Jatiya Party was, when it was in power. Nobody is challenging the BNP's right to govern the country (although in JP's case, people challenged its right to govern). Yes, some demanded resignation of the BNP government

But on different issues. As long as they (BNP) are the majority in the parliament they have the right to govern, and also be subjected to criticism.

We should now promote politics of consent in the

Japanese leaders have opened

a line of communication which

will no doubt prove most useful

for our future relationship with

the plenary session of the

Council of the Socialist Inter-

national on 10 May provided an analysis of the political situ-

ation in Bangladesh. She ex-

Sheikh Hasina's speech at

country rather than politics of convenience. At the same time, we believe that the caretaker government is not enough for free and fair election, we should also resist black money and use of muscle power and exploitation of religion in politics. Among us MPs, there are 164 millionaires. So money rules politics, not people. If one is a rich man, he buys a nomination of a big party and gets elected.

There should be laws against

such practices. The use of

muscle power was resisted in

the '91 election. But it returned in the mayoral election (the Lalbag murder incident is a case in point.) There are inadequate laws against these sorts of crimes, and they are not properly enforced. During the last mayoral election we filed over a dozen cases against candidates breaking the limit on election expenditure fixed by the EC. But police did not take any step in response to our complaint. So, if we all agree to hold elections under a caretaker government, no body can accuse anybody of rigging or biasness. The democratic process will also become smooth. I strongly believe. democracy cannot be defined by a single formula. Democracy should be defined and devised according to our country's own peculiarities and needs. If we incorporate the idea of caretaker government in our definition of democracy. I see no

Constitution is the reflection of peoples' will. We can amend it when people need it. Also dialogue in politics is a very important democratic practice. It is not possible for the ruling party or the opposition to be supportive of democracy by not talking to each other.

Tomorrow Dr. Khandoker Mosharraf Hossain, Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources and Member, Standing Committee, BNP argues against the proposition.

Sheikh Hasina's Recent Visit to Japan

EW people in Banglaciesh seem to know nuch about the Socialist Iriter national. Before my departure for Tokyo on 8 May the telephone kept on ringing non-stop. Journalists and friends were asking me about this organization and the nature of its meeting in Tok yo. Their curiosity was understandable, stemming from the fact that Sheikh Hasina, the President of Bangladesh Awarni League and Leader of the Opposition was going to attend the meeting of the Socialist linternational Council meeting in Tokyo on 10-11 May. Now that we have returned from Tok yo after a highly successful vis it I feel I should write on the subiect in order to answer mainy of the question which I did not have the time to Answer e ar-

The Socialist International is the worldwide organization of socialist, social democratic and labour parties. It is the oldest and largest international political association, currently comprising 111 parties and organizations from all continents. The Socialist Interna-

tional, whose origins go back 1864, has existed in its prent form since 1951 when it is re-established at the Frankfurt Congress. The organization provides its members with a forum for political action, policy discussion, dialogue and exchange of views. It should be noted that the Bangladesh Awami League is not a member of the Socialist International and the rescent Tokyo Council meeting was attended by the Awami League as a "guest party." Ther efore the Awami League is riot a party to the policies and decisions of the Socialist International. It must however be mentioned here that during our Liberation War the Socialis International stood by the people of Bangladesh. It was one of the few international organizations which adopted a supportive policy towards our cause. It is for this reason that

national and the Awami League have maintained close and cordial relations. The recent invitation to Sheikh Hasina to attend the conference ought to be seen in that context. For Sheikh-Hasina this warm invitation from old friends gave her an opportunity to renew longstanding friendship and to forge new links. She also availed of the opportunity offered by the occasion to declare in unambiguous terms the new economic policies of the Awami League, firmly based on the operation of market forces and the premise that an unfettered private sector must be the primary engine of economic growth.

Two Japanese political parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Democratic Socialist Party of Japan (DSPJ) hosted the conference which was held in the New Otani Hotel of Tokyo on 10-11 May. There two socialist parties were included in the previous coalition government formed by Hosokawa but the Hata coalition includes only the SDP. The Democratic Socialist Party had policy differences with Hata and as a result it quit the coalition. However negotiations are going on for a compromise. The Hata coalition government will fall if the SDPJ votes against him. For the first time in Japanese history the socialists are playing a significant role in shaping government policies as part of the government and not from the opposition benches. It is against this background that the Council of the Socialist International met in Tokyo. The government adopted a supportive stance and both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister hosted lavish social functions in honour of the conference delegates.

The Asia-Pacific Committee of the Socialist International met in the afternoon of 9 May to make final preparations for the main conference. Sheikh Hasina attended this meeting and raised, inter alia, the question of the quality of develop ment assistance, the need for safeguarding the legitimate interests of local industries in the developing countries and the urgent need for providing access to the markets of the developed countries. She also informed the Committee about the devastation wrought by the recent cyclone in the Chittagong region. These points were well received and were eventually reflected in the resolutions adopted by the council. The council also issued a statement in which it expressed the hope that, given the vulnerability of Bangladesh to cyclones, floods

in particular, in Indo-China. Sheikh Hasina also met U Win Khef, the President of the Burmese League for Democracy and a close associate of Aung San Suu Kyi, the imprisoned leader of the Burmese democratic struggle. Sheikh Hasina expressed her concern for the brave leader of our neighbouring country and called for her early release.

The high point of the Awami League President's activities in Tokyo was her meetings with the Japanese Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. Prime Minister Hata hosted a grand reception and dinner on board a ship in Tokyo Bay in horiour of the conference delegates. While

plained Awami League's role in upholding the democratic rights of the people including the exercise of their voting rights of the people including the exercise of their voting rights in free and fair elections. She gave a clear exposition of Awami League's economic policies. Bangladesh Awami League stands," she declared, "fully committed to supporting a market oriented economic system." Her party's new economy policy package provides for, she continued, "full protection to foreign investors. Indeed we believe that foreign investment and joint ventures are acts of partnership in which both sides stand to gain. My party

> and expanding employment These and other remarks made by her were warmly received by the audience and it is expected that Japanese investors would take careful note of her statements on economic policies. Indeed a number of businessmen which included the representatives of Mitsubishi had detailed discussions with her on these questions. Quite clearly the need of the hour is to create the necessary confidence to attract Bangladesh.

believes that the government

should focus more on the basic

services of the state and the

creation of a modern infras-

tructure. Business should be

left to the businessmen so that

the society may benefit from

competition, dynamic growth

The Bengali community in Japan, compared to the expa-

triate Bengali communities in some other countries, is relatively small and new. It is also beset by many problems. But the welcome accorded to Sheikh Hasina by the community was certainly a memorable one. The reception organized by them was chaired by Mrs Hayakawa, the wife of late Mr Hayakawa, a true friend of Bangladesh. His friendship with Bangabandhu was warmly recalled by Mrs Hayakawa. Before her departure from Japan on 13 May Sheikh Hasina was entertained to an unofficial lunch by senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the course of the lunch she raised, inter alia, the question of helping our Bengali residents in Japan who have been facing numerous problems.

It was a short but eventual

visit. Through her contacts she showed that Sheikh Hasina attaches very high priority to the development of close relations with this great country. Looking at the recent economic history of East and South East Asia it is quiet clear that it is Japan which played a catalytic role in providing the initial capital and technology for generating their growth momentum. Bangladesh certainly needs Japanese Official Development Assistance but the role of Japanese direct foreign investment and technology is going to be of much greater importance. Other investors from Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, China and other countries from the region will follow the Japanese trail. The current stagnant economy can be repealed by a vibrant and dynamic one only if investors. both foreign and domestic. begin to invest in Bangladesh with confidence and in growing numbers. Her first visit to Japan, even though it was in the context of an international conference, reflects her assessment of the importance of forging close bilateral links with the Japanese government and business leaders. Her visit was a successful initial step in that direction

THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

and other natural calamities, the international community, in particular the developed countries, will extend all possible assistance to Bangladesh to cope with the economic consequences of these natural

calamities." The conference provided an excellent opportunity to Sheikh Hasina to meet and exchange views with a number of important leaders from different countries. The conference was chaired by Pierre Mauroy, the former Prime Minister of France. Ms Gro Harlem Bruntdland, Prime Minister of Norway, attended the meeting in her capacity as the Vice President of the Socialist International. Sheikh Hasina had the opportunity to have relaxed meetings with these leaders on matters of mutual interest. Her meeting with the second Prime Minister of Cambodia Mr Hun Sen was very useful in understanding the new geo-political configurations in South East Asia, and

the ship was cruising in the Bay the delegates mingled with each other to continue their discussions. It was on board this ship that Sheikh Hasina had her meeting with Prime Minister Hata. During the takes they recalled the visit paid by Barigabandhu to Japan and the pioneering role paid by him in laying the foundation of friendly relations between the two countries. Sheikh Hasina thanked Prime Minister Hata for the economic assistance provided by Japan to Banglaclesh. In particular she expressed her appreciation for Japan's assistance for the Jamuna bridge. Hata assured her of continued Japanese support to the development efforts of Bangladesh. Earlier in the day Foreign Minister Kakizawa had hosted a lunch in honour of the delegates at the new Otani Hotel when Sheikh Hasina had an opportunity to meet with him and discuss Japan-Bangladesh relations. These initial contacts with the

opportunities." foreign investors

since 1971 the Socialist/Inter-

Timely editorial

Sar Congratulations to The Daily Star for its wonderful editorial on Miss Iniverse. Sushmita Sen, a Berngali who 'did us proud.' It vvas heart warming to read the effusive compliments justly raid to this young Bengali girl, who suddenly focused the world's attention on the trodelen Bengali women. The reaction of the Communist Party is nothing unusual. The editorial is unusual. The Communist Party must be full of fogey, meanminded Bengali men, who cannot accept the idea at the best of times of their women getting fame and glory. And the idea of Bengali Miss Universe has totally shattered the complacency of their narrow minded existence.

Once again, congratulations to The Daily Star for a glorious job done. Let it be a trendsetter for the other selfcentered individuals and organisations of our Bengali society, with whom we unfortunately have to share the universe! And congratulations to the young Sushmita Sen, a beacon of hope and pride for the Bengali women. Go it, Sushmita. We are behind you. All the way.

Parveen Haque DOHS Dhaka Cantt, Dhaka.

Giant strides

Sir, US-Bangladesh "good relations" going steady for about 20 years update the "same ideals and goals - those of freedom, democratic government, and economic opportunity for all" shared by the nationals of both the states.

"Giants strides", assessed by the US President about the present Bangladeshi political and economic reforms, represents the super-power's attitude toward the incumbent administration of this South Asian nation.

American head of the state's hope that "people and leaders of Bangladesh will continue to build a free and democratic nation in which the human rights of all are fully upheld" upholds what the champion of civil rights can brag about.

Regardless of allegation about the violation of Human Rights Declaration in the home of UN headquarters where over two hundred thousand Bangladeshi descents reside. the assurance from the great donor to continue assisting this least developed country's economic development process should be accepted with

As a matter of optimism, the recent transformation in the world's dictatorial regimes, not overlooking Bangladeshi "autocratic rule" (back to the "democratic" governance now), has evidently

regained the recognition for respect for individual's freedoms in "free" states in the pluralistic "unipolar world".

M Rahman Zila School Road, Mymensingh

Bravo!

Sir, Everytime a natural calamity hits us we fall flat on our face and go begging to the world at large, never once realising what an insult we deal to our national prestige. Not only that, our government proudly presents a list of gratuitous grants it has received.

In the backdrop of such slanderous history of alms-

seeking, the (12th May) television news came as a sweet surprise. In an interview with the new Thai Ambassador, the Prime Minister very politely stated that her government had decided to give all the help needed to the cyclonebattered south-eastern Bangladesh from our own resources and hence no foreign help was needed at that stage, although the kind gesture of the Ambassador was gratefully acknowledged.

ter! You have once again made us feel proud to be citizens of this financially weak country of lion-hearted people.

Bravo, Madam Prime Minis-

A self-respecting citizen Chittagong