

## An Economic Update

It comes as a revelation that fiscal 1993-94 has closed with an ADP utilisation rate which is ten per cent higher than the figure for the year before. The benchmark year was not by itself a successful one in terms of development output, so that the bettering of the record of that year by some percentage points in 1993-94 is not something to be overjoyed with.

It would strike one as a feat though when it is considered that a mid-term review of last year's ADP implementation had depicted a very bleak picture with the bottom-line reading that Herculean efforts were needed in the remaining six months to make up for the lag in meeting the physical targets. It seems the desperate thrust to improve upon the situation came after all. However, a detailed break-down of implementation will be appreciated because it can provide guidance for clearing backlogs in the future.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman made the disclosure before an assemblage of Aid Group representatives of the World Bank, IMF, ADB, UNDP and the envoys of the USA, Japan, Canada, Australia, Sweden, Norway, EEC and the Netherlands in Dhaka — one would think appropriately — as they were the ones intermittently voicing concern over poor rates of ADP implementation.

We have come to know that high utilisation of the domestic resource upto 91 per cent of the total allocation of 2.45 billion US dollars in last year's ADP has made possible the 'satisfactory' outcome. This naturally beefs up the argument against occasional donor suggestions that the tax base be broadened and the utility rates raised to scrape more money to our purse. Since the availability of domestic resource has increased by virtue of collection of revenues we do not stand in need of widening or deepening the tax base at the moment — seems to be the Finance Minister's line of thinking. That is why he makes out a case for maximising collection under the existing VAT net rather than expanding its coverage which seems to be preferred by the IMF representative. But we are for rationalising VAT collection so that the escapes from it do not increase the burden on others.

Already our lowering of the tariff structure ahead of the other countries in the region has come under fire internally for very justified reasons. We have liberalised our market at the expense of the local industries which needed protection for some more time. This has virtually thrown open our market for the regional countries without any commensurate access gained to their markets.

While our exports declined by 15 per cent during the last quarter of fiscal 1993-94, imports into the country dropped by only one per cent in the same period. This serves as an eye-opener to the imbalance in foreign trade. And it is said that trade accelerates development five times more than foreign aid. But, of course, we cannot adopt a black and white approach to export and import. If the imports are production-oriented capital goods, raw materials and intermediate goods rather than a deluge of consumer items then they should be worthwhile. Are we keeping a tab on this?

## Why Polygamy?

The number of polygamous men in the country is rising at an alarming rate. So alarming is the trend towards polygamy that over a period of just 10 years between 1981 and 1991 the polygamous men have doubled. According to a Depthnews feature estimate carried in a Bangla daily the number of men taking more than one wife was 1,74,000, which increased to 730,000 in 1981 and by the year 1991 the number shot up to 1,400,000. Providing the statistics the report makes a small comment that the actual number might be even higher because not everyone marrying several times is likely to give the correct information. We wish we could agree more with this observation.

As one scholar believes — and there is hardly any ground to contradict him — the tendency of polygamy is on the rise in the poor segment of our population. But when he detects the lack of entertainment as the primary cause of such marriage, we cannot help differing from his views. We however fully agree with the observation that men find it convenient to take a number of wives in the absence of a hard and fast rule to take the responsibility of the growing families. Taking an undue advantage of the religious sanction, men can take several wives — upto four — at a time. But some go on a marriage spree, skirting around the sanctions.

What remains untold is that each of these marriage maniacs is a lecher and some of them have conveniently combined their sexual predilection with material gains that come their way through each new marriage. But what a way of increasing the overall population of the country! And also what a waste! The abandoned women and children are simply deprived of the basic human care needed for them to grow up as the worthy citizens of the land. Either they add to the existing huge number of beggars or to all kinds of anti-social elements.

Women constitute 48.6 per cent of the total population. If 6.5 per cent of the men tie their nuptial chords more than once, does it mean that some of them have to pass their lives as confirmed bachelors? Not necessarily. The impression on the other hand is that more nubile girls than eligible bachelors seem to be waiting in the wing for their turn to start a family. If we go by the theory of demand and supply, it is evident that young men rather than the opposite sex are more in demand. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain the existence of a system like dowry — one that must be brought to the husband's family from the girl's parents, and also one that accounts for so much repression on women, sometimes even for their lives. If the cruelty, thanks to dowry, does not go to that extreme, it surely ends up in a severed marriage.

This is how the sexual balance in our society is maintained. But the evil of polygamy spews a sizable unwanted and dependent population. Unless this is strictly dealt with and religious provisions applied discreetly, the disparities between men and women, between different classes of society and between our population size and our means to feed them will continue to widen. That we cannot allow because it will be suicidal.

THE euphoria over the fall of communism and restoration of democracy during the late 1992 in Soviet Russia and Eastern Europe has, unfortunately, given way to despair and gloom. In Soviet Russia itself, feuds broke out among its ruins. After the unification of Germany, street gangs launched most ugly attacks on foreign immigrants there. The ugly outbreak of sectarian violence and ethnic cleansing operation in Bosnia, Somalia, Georgia, India and lately in Rwanda have brought to the fore a spasm of human nastiness. The terrible carnage that goes unchallenged with unrelenting savagery pities the human civilization and cultural advancement that the world leaders so proudly proclaim.

With the breakdown of authority in Eastern Europe people coalesced into national groups that communist governments had so long tried to suppress. The Serbs had been the dominant ethnic group in the Federal state of Yugoslavia but as the country was torn asunder and fell apart in two individual republics, the Serbs living outside Serbia in Bosnia

## Does the Collapse of Communism and Cold War Give Rise to Fratricide and Ethnic Cleansing?

by Md Asadullah Khan

and Croatia, apprehending that they would be driven out, used the military muscle of their ethnic allies in Belgrade to create a greater Serbia and thus 'ethnic cleansing' was born. The holocaust let loose by the Serbian army on the beleaguered Muslim population of Bosnia-Herzegovina reminds us of the brutality and repression unleashed on Bangladeshis in 1971 by the Pak-occupation army. Hardly anything remains in Bosnia now. Houses, hospitals and churches are rubble. Trees stand charred and broken.

Today barbarism rules in the land which was once the most civilized part of Europe. Most worrisome and shocking as it may sound, Yugoslavia's troubles and aches are spilling over the borders and travelling from this country to other far away parts of the world like a terrible infectious disease. The very onset of political freedom has sent shock waves and rip-

ples of pain everywhere. No wonder, it is known to all parties embracing democratic rules, that democracy can be a very messy business, especially in its early stages. One of its risks that evidently accompanies it is that political parties will divide along ethnic, tribal or religious lines, fomenting antagonism, instead of building compromise.

Taking the case of East European countries and USSR, we see that after years of life in a police state, they suddenly found themselves with what amounts to no state at all. People were haunted by a sense of economic insecurity tossed from a planned economy to a competitive one. Besides the trauma of religious intolerance and ethnic clashes springing from a fear of homelessness has caused all the upheavals in the countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Nepal, Afghanistan and

Pakistan. The Hindu-Muslim carnage that started with the demolition of Babri Mosque in India in 1992, has not ceased yet.

Fundamentalism is gaining ground in all places stretching from Iran, Libya, India and spills over the borders of these countries to the remotest Bangladesh. Communism has collapsed but the least desirable traits of communism still lives on. Convinced that theirs is the one true faith, the zealots feel utterly justified in persecuting and killing their neighbours in the name of God. Exactly this has happened in India. The charismatic leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party L K Advani does not eat meat and fish and leads a spartan life. But when it comes to building support for his Hindu revivalist BJP, Advani is a believer in non-secular excess. That is what he had exactly done in Ayodhya by embarking

on a "Chariot tour" in 1992 to whip up Hindu fervour for the BJP. And this holy march left a trail of Hindu-Muslim rioting taking a heavy toll of human lives from both the factions.

This religion-based fervour and passion have spilled over to Bangladesh and people in the name of religion have been fuelling the crisis in a way that tends to push the country on the crossroads of conflict causing concern to all and sundry.

Intellectuals all over the country, bemoan this zealotry that burdens this beautiful land of Bangladesh with hatred, passion and last of all bloodshed — thwarting progress and development in the vital sectors like economy and literacy. Should we have to believe that despite so much of advancement and awakening the old human nature, the divisions — neighbour against neighbour, race against race — would continue to dominate over our

conscience. Events taking place all around the country raise doubts about whether we are getting any better at bridging these gaps. It is a common knowledge that authoritarian or dictatorial regimes sometimes stir up communal hatreds and sectarian passions in a bid to show that the country would crumble down under democratic rule. It so happened in Kenya where President D. Arap Moi had played on tribal rivalries to halt the process of political pluralism. The same tactics were followed in South Africa by instigating trouble between the two main black factions, the ANC and Inkatha.

But it should not be the case for a democratic government that has come to power through people's mandate. The recent trend of factionalism sweeping over the whole country brings to focus one thing very clearly — how such splits can fracture a young democracy. This surge of hatred and passion is gradually degenerating into a disorder. No wonder a fear has crept in and the edifice of reform built painstakingly over the last few years is threatened to collapse.

THE recent developments in the Taslima Nasreen case have the potential of such long term consequences, affecting the life of the nation, that quick and decisive action by the government is urgently called for. The fundamental problems of politics and economic development that we face are being obscured by this unnecessary controversy. The situation should never have been allowed to escalate to this extent and could perhaps have been dealt with more effectively at an earlier stage. However, with the Penguin edition of her book many of Taslima Nasreen's champions have come to recognize the lack of intellectual, literary and artistic merit in her writings. Her media interviews have revealed her abysmal ignorance of facts (such as the difference between the Quran and the Sharia), not to mention her total ignorance of rationality in thought.

The continued attention of

## Taslima Nasreen Affair : Quick Action Needed

by Yasmeen Murshed

the foreign media is puzzling for most of us. Is it so hard to recognize that she is making successively more outrageous statements each time she speaks to the press not because she has anything important or worthwhile to contribute but merely to draw attention to herself and her simplistic brand of radical feminism?

How anyone has ever taken Taslima Nasreen seriously is difficult to understand. When she suggested the use of force to counter force stating rather self consciously that the solution to the rape of women by men is for women to rape men instead, I could only react by saying, surely she jests. Unfortunately, the lady has been blessed neither with a sense of humour nor a sense of proportion! Apart from asking how her solution is biologically and technically possible, can one justify any attention being

paid to statements like that? The press might as well print the ravings heard at Speakers Corner in Hyde Park! Taslima Nasreen reminds me of the infant who repeats his newly learnt four-letter word at the family dining table not because he understands what it means but simply for the attention it gets him. Well, the good "Dr Spock" told us to ignore the child and he would soon drop the word from his repertoire. Alas, the media has not followed this excellent advice and has created instead an "enfant terrible".

I am concerned not because the village moulti in Bangladesh is taking her seriously enough to issue "fatwas" against her but because the press calls her a Bangladeshi "feminist". To many of us, she is Bangladeshi "kook", as the Americans so quaintly put it —

not representative of any brand of feminism or indeed any other "ism" that is found in the country except perhaps irrationalism! The bleeding heart liberals who espouse her cause do so at their own peril because her views are as extreme as that of any fundamentalist.

Thankfully most Bangladeshis continue to hold their rather moderate, easy going views on life, love and the Hereafter; the Jamaat has disassociated itself from the "fatwabaz" and the Nirmul Committee has declared its distance from Taslima Nasreen!

It is now imperative for the government to act firmly and swiftly because there are not too many options available. The legalistic stand is that Taslima Nasreen should be accountable under the laws of the land for views expressed in public

which question the sanctity of the beliefs of the majority of her countrymen and if found guilty she should be punished to whatever extent that the judge deems fit as he would in any other case that he tried.

(Of course by the same token action against the so-called "fatwabazes" should be equally swift and firm). Since the government appears not to know her whereabouts this will necessarily be a passive stand as long as she remains in hiding and the government will continue to face a difficult situation in the country. So why not consider the expedient alternative — since the European Union would like to have the pleasure of looking after Taslima Nasreen, why not let them have her? To borrow a phrase from school children "GR to VR" which translates as Good Riddance to Bad Rubbish? A hint to an ambas-

sador and a couple of discreet airport officials are all that is required and this rather naive and foolish woman will sink into the obscurity she deserves.

We have many more urgent and pressing problems to tackle — the parliamentary deadlock for one and, more importantly, the economy. So let us not waste any more time on these distractions. The real Bangladeshis feminists wherever they are (in social service organizations, the NGOs, the government, in politics) who are working so hard to put women's issues on the national agenda and share the burden of development equally with our male compatriots, have to accept the setback we have suffered and work quietly to restore confidence in technology, development and progress at the grassroots level.

The writer is Director, Centre for Analysis and Choice, Dhaka.

## Outvoted Koirala Goes Back to the Country

Binod Bhattarai writes from Kathmandu

A tug-of-war within the ruling Nepali Congress Party has resulted in a sudden dissolution of Parliament and a fresh general election, barely three years after the replacement of absolute monarchy with a Westminster-style system of government. Gemini News Service reports on Prime Minister Koirala's manoeuvre.



Congress leaders Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Girija Prasad Koirala

Bhattarai's defeat, which led to the victory of a rival communist candidate.

Dissenters hoped that the party's Central Working Committee would take disciplinary action against Koirala, but at the end of June Bhattarai said he forgave all who had "sabotaged" his election prospects.

The dissenters, however, decided to go ahead and pressure Koirala to change his "authoritarian" style and end

corruption in government.

Bhattarai was attempting to bring about a rapprochement between the feuding factions but the talks fell apart just before the House vote. The subsequent election move was a surprise.

"We have no regrets," said Chiranjibi Wagle, spokesman for the rebel camp after the government's defeat. Wagle's group had hoped to elect a new leader from among Congress members and had

not expected Koirala to opt for elections. Nepal's powerful communist opposition — which controlled 68 parliamentary seats compared with Congress' 113 and 23 for smaller parties — was not ready for the move either.

They have been further angered by King Birendra's decision to let Koirala head the caretaker government and administer the November poll.

The Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist) — UML denounced the King's decision as "unconstitutional" and demanded the formation of an all-party coalition government to administer the polls. It vowed to embark on a nationwide agitation campaign to press the demands.

The King could have asked other parties to try and form government; he did not do that, said UML general-secretary Madhav Kumar. "We also oppose his decision to let Koirala conduct the polls, which could lead to grave consequences."

UML supporters began streets protests immediately

after the announcement of the King's decision. Four years ago, street protests organised by communists and the Nepali Congress Party forced King Birendra to agree to restore the multi-party system which had been scrapped 30 years before. Under the new Constitution, the King — who ruled from 1972 to April 1990 as near absolute monarch — transferred sovereignty to the people and guaranteed fundamental rights.

Koirala appears to have the upper hand in the balance within Congress, which is led by a troika of Koirala, Bhattarai and 80-year-old Ganesh Man Singh.

"Unless the leaders reach some understanding, that leadership pattern may change," says Narahari Acharya, a Nepali Congress MP in the National Council (Upper House). "If the differences persist, there could even be a split."

The intensity of the communist-led anti-Koirala agitation will be a key factor in the campaign, though Koirala survived a period of communist

agitation in July-August last year.

A patch-up within the Nepali Congress Party could cool the simmering political cauldron, but looks unlikely at least for the moment. "It is a do-or-die situation," said Ganesh Man Singh in a local hospital where he was receiving treatment for a neck injury when Nepal's politics changed gear.

The Election Commission's task of organising the election is made difficult by poor transport and communications in the Himalayan kingdom. Voting will take place immediately after the monsoons, when roads and communication networks are often severed for days on end.

"We will do our best to ensure free and impartial elections," said Election Commissioner Bishnu Pratap Shah. "We will have to work hard for that."

Electoral costs are estimated at Rs300-400 million, a substantial amount in a country with an average annual per capita income of \$170.

"That's no excuse," says Narahari Acharya. "Once we have opted for democracy, we must be prepared to shoulder the costs of elections, which are an essential part of the governing system."

(Exchange rate: \$1= 49 rupees).

BINOD BHATTARAI is senior editor of Spotlight news-magazine in Kathmandu.

## 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.

### Mustafa Aziz

Sir, Your correspondent Delawar Kabir in his feature entitled 'He still fights to preserve his works' on page 8 (National) of July 10, 1994 perhaps could not do full justice either to Mustafa Aziz or the readers.

Firstly, Mustafa Aziz is the son of renowned Poet Gulam Mustafa (the author of the book 'Bishwa Nabi' that put him to fame and also made him wealthy during the early 50s). Poet Gulam Mustafa's elder son Anwar Aziz was in the Indian Force and had married a woman of Hindu faith. Anwar Aziz died in a plane crash in Dhaka while he was trying to test his 'Sitara-e-Imtiaz' (a new wide-bodied aircraft) after joining the Pakistan Air Force. Mustafa Aziz also married a woman of Hindu faith. There are two other brothers: Mustafa Monowar (BTV celebrity) and Mustafa Pasha. Mustafa Pasha happens to be a step brother. Poet Gulam Mustafa built a house at Shantinagar — 'Mustafa Manzil' — and set his abode there with his second wife and youngest son. After

his death came Mustafa Monowar to live at the Shantinagar house. Then came Mustafa Aziz. Trouble started from then on. Mustafa Aziz was reportedly ousted by Pasha and Monowar. The poet's second wife still lives. Her son has divided up the one-story building.

Secondly, Mustafa Aziz seems to have never kept, or been able to, relevant working relationship (public relations) with journalists, nor did he ever try to be popular. However, he was a most popular 'cartoonist' and his works adorned the front page of 'The Morning News' during the Pakistan times.

Thirdly, Mustafa Aziz is a person who is rare to find and whose work is rather incomparable but no one ever cared. He is perhaps unable to play subtle games with anyone or indulge in worldly shrewdness. An artist of his calibre is really difficult to find. Yet, at the age of 72, he is in poverty. This is incredible. His collection of cartoons alone would enrich any publisher as well as the artist himself and bring international sales and fame. His dreams of Gulam Mustafa

Academy should be turned into a reality by the nation itself for which the poet had written so many rousing patriotic songs and verses. And since Mustafa Aziz is a Muktiyoddha, both the Muktiyoddha Foundation and the concerned ministries should be able to give him all required help. All it needs is public recognition and attention — and a journalistic follow up.

Nahtasha Kamal  
Dhaka

### HBFC's initiative

Sir, Thanks for the new initiative of the HBFC for rationalising the interest rate and rescheduling the loan instalment. Separate interest rates have also been announced. But in case of fixing the interest rate of the Dhaka metropolitan city all the areas have been grouped together. For example Gulshan, Baridhara, Banani and Dhanmondi cannot be fairly grouped together with Uttara, Mirpur, Shamoli, Mohammadpur and so on.

Gulshan, Baridhara, Banani, Motijheel CA, and Dhanmondi may be grouped in a new zone, called, say, the Mega Zone (MZ). And fixing 12 per cent rate of interest for this MZ on the rate of interest of the remaining areas — Non Mega Zone (NMZ) — may be revised to 11 per cent.

Innumerable middle class people, government officials,

small traders, commercial employees live in the proposed NMZ. While fixing interest rate and instalment of repayment it has to be taken into consideration how the loan money could be repaid. Since the rate of interest cannot be further reduced, the number of instalments can further be rationalized to enable government employees and other small entrepreneurs to start living in their own houses. This would also reduce the pressure on the government flats.

The Finance Ministry may also consider fixing one bank for each district to sanction loan for house building at moderate rate of interest. This would enable HBFC to concentrate on Dhaka and Chittagong metropolitan areas.

Alimuzzaman  
Elephant Road, Dhaka

### "Fare you well, NU"

Sir, On behalf of the National University I thank you very much for your editorial "Fare you well, NU" published on July 17, 1994. Occasioned by the publication of Degree results of National University, the editorial has made some terse observations on our education system as a whole. Its main focus, however, is on the National University which, it is stated, has taken away the headaches of other universities and removed the chances of unfair practices of the assessors.

While counselling caution that the National University does not come to mean standard quality and turn into an all-examination University, it sets forth a number of suggestions which all but express a real concern of a responsible paper for the National University at its nascent stage. It is a constructive gesture. But we think, however, that the editorial could come in a different and more fruitful way were it the outcome of a deeper perusal of the National University Act of October 1992 creating this University. The very Act provides that the University will promote higher education in colleges, affiliate them on fulfillment of necessary conditions, supervise, monitor and offer academic support and cooperation, frame syllabuses for different courses, update them from time to time, hold examinations in time and arrange for proper evaluation. This is for a meaningful academic network to be built up between the University and colleges. And then there will be the campus with full-fledged faculties and schools providing research facilities for conducting M Phil and Ph D. To improve professional competence, training programmes for subject teachers will also remain a regular feature of the university.

So the National University has a deep academic commitment and it stands little chance of degenerating into "a

dump of educational dross of the society" or turning into a fifth board doing nothing but examination work. This is all to allay the fears of sincere hearts and not to belittle the message the editorial carried.

Firoze Ahmed Akhtar  
Registrar  
National University, Gazipur

### Bully at school

Sir, Bullying is a classic school problem in the west wherein a study of 4000 children (UK) by the Kidscope, a child safety advocacy group documented 35% of wards as victims of some sort of bullying. In response many had missed school, pretended illness or even attempted suicide. All these came to light when teachers in a London city school became suspicious as they discovered that some of their students had suddenly stopped eating lunch.

Damage to children in schools in Bangladesh remains unestimated as we are yet to recognise bullying as a problem, or we even fail to take suitable measures when such cases are reported in schools.

Yet bullying is affecting the life-style of many in our schools requiring immediate recognition, survey and attention to such cases.

Col Mirza Shafi (rtd)  
Banani, Dhaka