Dhaka, Friday, September 16, 1994

Stand-off and Prices

We may have run out of luck with the sustained stability in rice prices. What a loosening of a grip this is over the market of daily provisions!

A Daily Star market survey report underlined this hard fact the other day. Both coarse and fine quality rices are selling dearer by Tk two to four per kg compared with their more or less static prices some weeks ago. For some years the virtually frozen rice prices obviously did not set off any chain reaction in the prices of a long list of other daily necessaries. Of course the prices of non-cereal commodities soared off their own motion adding a new facet to market behaviour. Since we now notice a disturbance in the rice priceline there is bound to be a further disequilibrium in the other areas - that old sympathetic price-rise, so to speak. We are in for an accentuated push-up effect on the prices of daily essentials other than the staple item. The edible oils have recorded a price rise of Tk one to three per litre. And onion sells dearer by Tk eight per kilo than a few months ago. The salaried people and the daily wage carners are as usual the hardest-hit.

At the wholesalers' points the stock positions were good but the retailers took advantage of the transportation dislocation caused by hartals that came in a row. Now as everybody knows, we had a lull in political strikes for some time but it hardly made any difference in the price situation. There are two reasons why this extraordinary thing happened. One, we have had a flash flood in the east, a drought in the north, and a seasonal drop in production between the Irri harvest and the Aman harvest. Also, it is not yet time for the Rabi crops to hit home — these are just about to be planted in any comprehensive way. All these created pressure on prices. It is about this time of the year that local vegetable supplies keep moderate, even low, levels, just before their abundance beginning from October right upto February. And it is the depleting stocks of Aus and Irri that are barely replenished by release of cereals from the government godowns.

 So, this is a very wrong time for political agitation by the opposition and physical resistance against it by the ruling party. Unfortunately though, with the monsoon over, this has been traditionally regarded as the right season to take matters to the street. Other alternative means should be tried to ride out of a political crisis.

The prices have hardly ever been a respector of budgetary discipline. While the budget for the current year held out some concrete hopes for a fall in the prices of many daily necessities by reason of the reductions made in the duties structure, the desired outcome has evidently eluded us. This places the blame at the doorstep of the government insofar as it has failed to live up to its budgetary resolve to bring down the prices. Assuming that there is market monitoring of sorts we do not see how the information gathered are utilised through any price control mechanism. The question is, have they one?

The opposition, too, has a role here to pinpoint why the prices are rising particularly in the constituencies they represent, organising consumer resistance and consulting with the trade and industry leaders as a normal function to ensure their cooperation in stabilising the prices at a tolerable level. Going for political agitation without respite and then making an issue of the rising prices can hardly carry conviction or pull the full weight of the opposition behind the task. The demand-supply equilibrium is badly unsettled when speculative trading feeds on an uncertain political situation.

Haiti Awaits Invasion

Haiti's military strongman Raul Cedras is no Saddam Hussein. But he has been acting like the Iraqi president before the US-led multinational troops' invasion. Compared with Iraq's military strength. Haiti's is really insignificant. But men of dictatorial mould are hardly objective in the assessment of their strength. Saddam was humbled and so will Cedras be much sooner in the event of an attack. And the way things are developing, an attack looks all the more imminent.

US President Clinton who has taken the initiative to invade Haiti does not want to give any more time to the military leaders in the tiny Caribbean country with only 300,000-strong population. The mission of reconstructing democracy, according to the American president, has waited much too long. Now Cedras must go and elected president Jean Bertrand Aristide exiled in the USA must be allowed to return to his country to take over the office.

We also share President Clinton's concern for the establishment of democracy in Haiti as also elsewhere. But what we find unacceptable is the inconsistent policing role of both the US and the United Nations. Sure enough, Raul Cedras is an usurper and must not be allowed to consolidate his illegitimate and repressive rule. No matter if he is doing so through a hand-picked president, a former judge. Everyone knows the real power lies in the hands of the general.

As the UN-sponsored invasion looks like taking place any movement this week, we cannot help asking the question if the same standard is being applied in case of similar rejection of popular mandate or even more atrocious and deplorable crimes. What has been taking place in Nigeria is no different from the developments in Haiti since Aristide's ouster in 1991. But the Bosnian defiance of a world opinion beats all such violations in today's world. Surprisingly, on those issues the UN or US role has not been equally aggressive and determined.

Countries around the world are sending troops because they considered it a principled stand. The multinational force is going to take part in the operations under the UN Security Council Resolution Number 940. That is sound enough. But the whole exercise would not look flawed if similar offenders were made to pay equally for democracy to operate everywhere smoothly.

New Ideas Needed to Resolve Kashmir Issue Prakash Chandra writes from New Delhi

vising India and Paki-stan to develop a new vising India and Paki-Families lined up against the wall and searched as part of security measures adopted to counter the insurpolicy on Kashmir in line with gents reminded people of British troops searching Indian homes and maltreating civilians. international opinion that

supports a peaceful settlement of the protracted conflict. including the Kashmiri insur-They propose that the two gents. countries explore other solu-

ANY countries are ad-

Great Britain, are anxious to

see the end of the Kashmir

dispute that has claimed more

than 7,500 lives. The

Americans are keen to broker

peace and good relations be-

tween these two countries. But

they have frequently changed

their posture regarding which

administration was clearly

sympathetic to India. It

seemed to share the Indian

view on the role of Pakistan in

fomenting terrorism in

Kashmir. Washington even

went to the extent of putting

Kashmir on the watch list of

insisting that India must hold

tripartite talks with Pakistan.

the names and addresses of

largest number of citizens of

our country. These important

documents prepared and

compiled by the Election

Commission Secretariat at a

huge cost are now used for

only one purpose. That is for

the elections. The voters lists

can serve as multiple purpose

and multi-dimentional docu-

Voters list now contains (1)

name of the voter. (2) father's

or husband's name, (3) age, (4)

Age and Profession

not adequate or specific to

make voters list a multi-pur-

pose document. Age is uncer-

tain, but the date of birth is

certain. Asking a villager or a

neighbour, an enumerator may

give the age of a voter, but it is

more difficult to know the date

of birth. Age can be guessed,

but an enumerator has to con-

tact the voter and know the

date of birth otherwise, he has

speculation.

to manufacture it based on

written in the voters lists as

aching, etc. It is easy to pro-

vide false information about a

profession by stating service.

is unique. There are laws of

Economics just as there are

laws of Physics, and they apply

whether you are talking about

Kazakhstan or whether you are

talking of Sichuan." These are

the remarks of Milton

Friedman, the 1976 Nobel lau-

reate in Economic Science,

the Professor of the Chicago

School of Economic Thought,

the man who inspired Reagan

and Thatcher, in a question

and answer session in Hong

Kong in 1993. Free market re-

verses our thinking from the

producer priority to that of the

sovereignty of the consumer

and, from high-sung national-

ism to down-to-earth individu-

alism. Economics is not of

needs but of wants. We may

need few but could want many

The producer in order to sat-

isfy the wants and needs of the

consumer, efficiently organises

only in a free market, labour-

capital-technology and his en-

trepreneurship to competi-

tively produce such goods or

services which satisfy the lim-

The promise of simple dal

and bhat or, rice and fish, may

be the end of an economy

itless wants of the consumer.

and the list is simply endless.

▲ LTHOUGH every co-

Auntry thinks it is

1 unique, no country

service/agriculture/business/te

Profession of the voter is

The above particulars are

profession. (5) address.

But now, the Americans are

T OTERS lists are the

only national docu

ments which contain

At one stage, the Clinton

country to support.

terrorist states.

ments.

negotiations.

point out.

In the past, the Americans also supported Pakistan. tions to the problem, such as Although this has already resolving it through peaceful stopped, the Pakistani military top brass still maintain very Three wars have shown that good working relations with violent action is futile, they the Pentagon. Pakistan continues to receive military sup-The western powers, inplies, sometimes on a concescluding the United States and

sional rate. However, now Washington is demanding new initiatives from New Delhi and Islamabad to break the Kashmir impasse, the chief source of destabilization in the subcontinent.

One senior western official suggests a Bhutan-type sovereignty for Kashmir. This means that India could handle the defence and external affairs of a new state of Kashmir. comprising both the Indian side and the Pakistan occupied state.

Some analysts say another solution would be to recognize the international boundary between Pakistan-occupied and Indian Kashmirs.

But this proposed partition of the disputed state is being

rejected by the fundamentalist Hindu party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which considers such formula a sell out to the West and to Pakistan. Even to Pakistan itself, this proposal is not acceptable. The new Prime Minister, and Kashmiri Muslim separatist groups are backing a United Nations resolution calling for a plebiscite to determine whether the people in the disputed area want to remain part of the predominantly-Hindu India or join

Many Pakistani officials privately concede that the only solution is to have an independent state comprising the two Kashmirs, whose frontiers could be guaranteed by India and Pakistan.

Islamic Pakistan.

The Kashmiri people have been angered and estranged from the Indian government ever since the Muslim insurgency began in 1989.

Events connected with the insurgency brought back bitter memories of what happened in 1942. Families lined up against the wall and searched as part

of security measures adopted to counter the insurgents reminded people of British troops searching Indian homes and maltreating civilians. It is impossible for the Kashmiris to forgive and forget their humiliation in the hands of the

Indian Border Security Force. Border security has become India's most rapidly-growing industry. According to one conservative estimate. New Delhi is spending a minimum of 30,000 million rupees (US \$957 million) annually on these forces.

Policy analysts recognize the fact that Pakistan has scored not only propaganda advantages in Kashmir. It seems to have put a fairly logical case, although and foreign governments have backed India in its argument that Islamabad has been backing the terrorists with arms.

Many independent observers believe that the Hazratbal incident, where in the Indian Army and other security forces laid siege on the famous Muslim shrine supposedly because of fears that the

militants holed up inside might take some drastic action, had been carefully staged by Kashmiris anxious to secure international recognition of their homeland's problem Another aim was to force India's hands to negotiate with Pakistan on Kashmir's future.

possibly on Islamabad's terms. Some policy analysts, thus, feel that the withdrawal of the militants from the Hazratball shrine need not be considered a great victory for the Indian army and the Border Security Force. For the Kashmiri militants have attained their objectives.

It was Indian Prime Minister Rao who initiated talks with Pakistan on Kashmir that reopened at the start of the year. He proposed the talks in his congratulatory message to Ms Bhutto after the polls. He explains: "I would like to suggest that wide ranging and sustained bilateral discussions commence between India and Pakistan as early as possible, the objective being to progressively normalize relations between our two

Madam Bhutto, for her part, gave the assurance that her government is prepared to engage in serious and purposeful discussions in order to resolve this issue as well as other problems "between our two countries through peaceful negotiations.

But recently. Ms Bhutto has gone all out to lambast India for the alleged repression in Kashmir and New Delhi's failure to respond to international opinion on what Pakistan perceives to be another Bosnia. The cause may be self-defeating, but the Indian government has done very little to refute the repression charge of the Bhutto government.

The Pakistani Prime Minister has spared no efforts to link the Kashmir problem with the hot nuclear issue. Pakistani generals and some policy-makers would like India to believe that the next round of war between the two countries could be nuclear. Supposedly, by making such threats. Ms Bhutto's aides want to pressure the Americans to mediate between New Delhi and Islamabad, which is unac-

ceptable to India. - Depthnews Asia

For A Multipurpose Voters List

by AZM Shamsul Alam

But if exact designation, name and address and telephone number of the organisation is wanted to be recorded in the information collection sheet, it would be difficult to record without visiting the household.

Addresses also are inadeguate. With amendment in the forms used for collection of information for voters, the voters lists could be improved and made a national manpower register of the adults of 18 years old and above.

Education

In order to make voters list a multi-purpose document, the quality of the voters list should be improved with additions in the voter information collection forms. For instance, if we include in the voters list, academic qualification with year. the educational level of the adult population in a locality can be understood from the voters list.

Particulars of academic qualification may be collected from neighbours, but the year of obtaining the last academic degree is more difficult to col lect without asking the persons concerned.

Number of educated people

level of education will enable the persons involved in mass literacy programme to motivate educated persons and thrust responsibility on them for removing the illiteracy of the uneducated people. Contact with educated persons will be helpful for identifying the volunteers for social work

in the locality. Help for the NGOs

The non-government organisations (NGOs) organise various development programmes in different regions and localities. It becomes easier for them to contact appropriate persons, if, in the voters list academic qualifications, age, professional designations complete address etc of the citizens are recorded. If academic levels of the voters are recorded in the voters list, the study of the manpower of the locality is greatly facilitated.

Telephone Nos of the Voters

If telephone numbers of the voters are recorded, contact and verification become easier. While preparing the voters list in future, provision may be kept for recording the the voters. Cooperation

If any voters list is prepared

telephone numbers, if any, of

with care and cautions, it can be used by the cooperative department staff as well. If the officers of cooperative depart ment want to organise a cooperative society in any field of activity, they can easily contact the concerned persons after the perusal of the voters list which would contain the names of the voters with academic qualifications, specific descriptions of professions and designations etc. The people of the locality may come in contact with each other under the guidance of the officers of the cooperative department for their welfare

Social Welfare

If the addresses of the voters are correct and clear, they can be easily located, and contact with the voters gets easier. Officers and personnel of Social Welfare Department can establish contact with citizens at ease or without any hindrance. Professional ad dress and positions, academic qualification etc may be helpful

trade and associated criminali-

to assess their attitude and ability to render community services.

Agriculture/Horticulture/ Tree plantation/Pisciculture/Livestock:

If some officers of developmental departments are willing to motivate citizens for improved method of cultivation, tree plantation, horticulture and kitchen-gardening. pisciculture, dairy farming etc. they can contact them after the perusal of voters list. Wellprepared voters lists make things easier for the functionaries of various developmental departments.

Relief Distribution

If any organisation wants to distribute relief to the sufferers of natural disasters such as cyclone, flood, epidemic or human-created disasters such as fire, rioting etc. the voters list can serve as a guide. Highly qualified educated people in the locality can be contacted and their views may be sought about the affected and deserving citizens. Retired persons can also be given some responsibilities.

Poverty Alleviation If from the professional de

scription, the number of unemployed persons in a locality or mohalla appears to be large, appropriate poverty alle viation programme for the uneducated unemployed can be thought of

Law and Order

Educated and the unemployed adults could be sources of social unrest and problem in the urban areas. Law enforcing authorities may be cautious about such people.

Marital description can also be recorded in the voters list or can be kept at least in the information collection forms. If a service holder or a peace loving person wants to rent a house, he would obviously try to avoid a locality having many unmarried, educated but unemployed youth in the adjacent houses

Preparation of the next country-wide voters list may cost our government around Tk 50 crore. A document compiled and prepared at such a huge cost should be comprehensive and must contain much more information than we have at present. Now, the credibility of the voters list is very poor because of the existence of fictitious names. If additional and more specific particulars are added in the information collection sheet, the extent of false information

would be reduced. oped or developing countries. Past political dangers, from the left and the right, had pro-

voked Third World military takeovers while ambitions of power and greed had prolonged military rules wasting opportunities for the democratisation of political and economic thinking and practice. Fortunately, the derivatives of prolonged rule elitist, statist, protectionist economic policies - are on the decline but nearly all Third World countries have law and order situations far below a citizen's expectations and, far behind the newly industrialised nations. Inadequate resource transfer to judicial and police services is the reason behind lawlessness in the Third World markets. The disorder is the greatest threat to economic creativity of the producer and consumer spending of the individual. The use of skill and resource-rich Third World military, looking inwards to safeguard life. property and markets can be the last closing act of the Cold War and the beginning of a new world of freedom, mar kets and order.

Chairman, MOER

in the electoral area with the

Upgrading Laws and Forces to Protect Markets by Nizam Ahmad

controlled by the State but, a decontrolled and liberalised market condition creates a burst of commercial, industrial, financial and technological activity as presently witnessed in Southern China. But liberalised economies risk extreme lawlessness and disorder. South China, capitalist Russia or disorderly tracts in the USA, Italy, UK, Japan etc. are good examples. Prominent business houses and businessmen had quit New York which no longer prides itself as the modern city of glorified capitalism. Russian markets are dominated by organised criminals, worse than the mafias of New York and Italy or the gangsters of Japan. Russia's gangsterism is deep-rooted and linked to investment decisions and transactions concluded at Russian boardrooms and conference halls. Decriminalisation of Russia (The Economist July 9th-15th 941 is more important than the demanding drive to bring in international traders and investors to Russian markets.

In New York or Naples. their constitution or public opinion restricts liberal use of

their country's modern armies to decriminalise their markets. Their civil law enforcing agencies were long deprived of state funds grimly mobilised to militarily crush Marxism Kidnapping for ransom is a successful underworld business in Bombay where the ganglords are too aware and informed of real estate property boom and profits. While, under a continued protectionist policy, Bangladesh customs, intelligence and police forces accompanied by magistrates, raid and hound shops. warehouses, trucks and trawlers, to search passengers and their bags for smuggled goods and medicine, with protectionism lifted, the jobs of our magistrates and forces would be to protect our shops, offices, buses, trains and trawlers so that no underworld criminal loot out property or endanger our lives. However, search for our bags and bank accounts will continue till an educative view (like those practised on alcohol and cigarette smoking) is globally formulated to curb illicit drug

sation. With protectionism and high tariff walls broken, today's smugglers will be tomorrow's sea pirates, urban mafias, highway robbers, possessing extra-ordinary armed organisations which only the constitutional-institutional State military can counter and crush. It would demand substantial resources and years to train and equip our police forces only to return to markets emptied of honest producers and investors. In our fast changing global actualisation of integrated markets, the wellequipped Third World military should be simultaneously

geared up to protect markets. Mainland China indiscriminately practices executions of criminals in their one party directive to decriminalise markets. In the modern sensitive world, executions are merciless and often the real criminals escape punishment as they are clever enough to disappear from the scene of crime leaving the innocents to be executed. The medieval policy of how swiftly how many

security to life and property offered, by the State, will not decriminalise markets. If Bangladeshi liberals succeed in negotiating transit fa-

executed but not how much

cilities (based on market laws and not on government invented policies) to India, Nepal. Bhutan or, if our Asian highway speeds eastwards connecting Burma through the Arakans to Thailand, Laos. Vietnam, China, and other South East Asian market economies, an unmatched flood of economic activity will burst open. The twenty-first century's silk route will be our economic opportunity of all opportunities. The black side of the picture will be the proportionate increase in economic piracy and terrorism. We must put in efforts now, to redesign our institutions (laws and forces) to deter such threats or, be once again dominated by the underworld criminalisation of our markets. This new economic role of the Third World military as an ex tended responsibility will provide security, discipline and confidence a free market democracy requires in devel

The writer is Executive

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.

Hasina and **British MPs**

Sir, I was amused to read in your newspaper (13.9.94) a "clarification" issued by Mr S A M S Kibria on some derogatory comments by his party chief. Sheikh Hasina, on the British parliamentary members who visited Bangladesh last week.

Hasina was clearly angry over their comments that a caretaker government was an absurd opposition demand in a democratic polity. She therefore labelled them as being brought in by the ruling party at the cost of public money to secure a certificate.

Hasina might have realised by hindsight that she had talked too much. She, therefore, asked Kibria to issue a clarification, which was in fact a rejoinder. But what kind of rejoinder it was? Without naming, Kibria at-

tacks a section of press, blaming all the confusion for it on them. In the next breath, he says Hasina made those comments because she had no first hand or prior knowledge of how the British parliamentary delegation was invited and their expenditure met.

Two points: 1) What was the confusion in that case if Hasina had really made such remarks? 2) How can the chief of a party, which claims to be the biggest in this country, make comments without being absolutely sure of facts?

Kibria has tried his best to fudge this issue with slipshod explanations. I am sure he realises that this exercise is use less because the people in this country are quite capable of distinguishing between the

black and the white. The truth of the matter is

that Hasina's comments betrays the quality of leader that she is, no matter how much bureaucratese he (Kibria) and some of his retired civil service colleagues endeavour to apply to make the black white. Mohammad Fasihuddin Ahmad 26/2 Pallabi, Dhaka

The political impasse, which way out?

Sir, Congratulation for your Editorial "This Brinkmanship may Easily go Out of Hand," Sept 12. Nothing is more relevant, pertinent and burning as the on-going political movement which is choking our nascent economy. It seems that the political parties are after their arrogance rather than thinking about the people. Why talk about the poor only? Are the businessmen. industrialists, executives not being affected by this political turmoil? The Opposition is crying for the rights of the poor people, I wonder what will the poor people do with

their voting rights if they go unfed and find no earning source. At the same time, may I pose a question to the ruling party? Now it seems they are shedding all their tears for the toiling masses; what have they done for them soon after getting elected? In this regard, I like to bring to their notice a news that told "Mahathir is not afraid to give early elections" As Mahathir's party has done a

lot for the Malayasian economy and for the Malaysians so they are not afraid to face any early elections.

Your newspaper also carried an article on "Infrastructure for Economic Development ... on the same day. The subject should also be a pointer for the political parties that where we stand regarding providing infrastructural facilities for our people and also the rating (therein) provides a pen picture of economic development

Do our politicians want our 120 million people wait to see our position slide from 146th to 200th in the HDI just because of their political squabble? Let the good senses of our politicians prevail before our starved people wait to see this country turned into Somalia or Rwanda. The WDR report contains some vital statistics which whip the conscience of the concerned citizens. It is high time to make our politicians think for the economic thrust

It is hard to believe that there are any group or private citizens who have no political bias or are not politically inclined to one party or another. If the present movement is for a neutral caretaker govern ment to supervise an election I believe there also we may face the difficulty of getting one without any political inclination

So the next question is which way out? I would suggest that why not invite the UN to supervise a real neutral election. As the UN only has proven record of supervising neutral, fair election as they have done it in South Africa and Cambodia

in this respect I like to request the editors of our news papers to form a group and meet the Honourable Prime Minister and also the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and try to get their

personal views on the present crisis and organize another big debate as it seems one debate did not bring them to their

As it seems more than obvious that they would not participate in any forum, both the leaders may be requested to nominate representative to debate on the political future of our country and kindly make sure that our honourable Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition are in the front row of spectators listeners

If our politicians and political parties fail to come to terms regarding future of the people and this country. think we should give a second thought and say no to any politicians during the next election.

Let our politicians rise to the occasion so that we can start appreciating their prudence, put our trust in them, feel proud about them and accept them as our leaders. Let them now draw line between personal gains and the future of 120 million people

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