

Soft-lending Outlook

After attending the World Bank and IMF annual meeting in Washington, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman brings home the latest thinking of the donor community on concessional lending. They are, he says, insistent on good governance as a precondition to the pledging and disbursement of soft loans.

The increasing emphasis on the linkage hardly surprises us. For, the Bretton Woods institutions' limited budget has been under pressure from the many candidates for assistance who have surfaced as a vowed followers of free enterprise and market-oriented models. The World Bank and IMF have to work on shoe-string budgets.

So the conventional thinking about the donor community feeling impelled to help us in their own interest for the sake of upholding democracy and free market economy cannot be stretched too far to our advantage. It must be realised that we are not only competing with the rest of the world in terms of economic efficiency but also against the yardstick of political management. We are only being pragmatic in suggesting that we set our house in order, so that what we demand from others does not sound like a favour or dole sought.

Under the World Bank assistance programme we are taking up this fiscal year some superb projects. Two of them relating to Dhaka WASA and Dhaka urban transportation, are close to our heart for the tremendous good these can do to water supply and transportation in Dhaka city. In the sphere of drinking water let's have the surface water treatment plant by all means; but a large part of our fifty per cent deficit has to be met basically by containing the systemic waste. This is needed because we can then divert the output of the water plant to cater to the growing demand of an increasing population. As for the urban transportation project, could we dovetail a scheme for traffic dispersal and transfer upwards through the construction of some fly-overs.

So, in addition to the crippling effects of the political impasse that dictate a speedy end to it, we have now the compulsion to create an enabling environment for economic growth.

Why Road Accidents?

A souvenir published on the occasion of an international seminar on road safety comes out with some chilling revelations. Suffice it to mention just two of them: first, Bangladesh has the highest annual accident rate — about 170 fatal accidents per 10,000 vehicles — in Asia; second, road accidents accounted for a national loss of Tk 10 billion — about one per cent of the GDP in the year 1994 alone. Let us give up any attempt to compare our accident rates with those of developed countries. The reason is understandable. But even in comparison with our neighbouring countries, the incidence of accidents is absurdly high and we present a pathetic picture.

There has been an attempt to determine the causes of this deplorable situation. Some would like to blame the fast speed of vehicles, others find fault with various road users, the lack of training for drivers, plying of vehicles unworthy of roads. And the list goes on and on. We would like to know how all such things can go on. You answer to this question and you get solution to much of the mess created on our roads over the years. Certainly some people who are paid for looking into all such irregularities and inappropriate conditions have less than required qualifications and are not doing their job properly.

As long as people responsible for looking into all affairs related to road transportation and maintenance of order can be bought or bribed, no system is expected to work perfectly. You can set up modern inspection centres but if the man there neglects his duty or deliberately misreports no benefits will accrue. That problem seems to be at the heart of the matter. You deal with it, and you have performed a great job; because rest of the things will fall in order automatically.

Counterfeit Currency

A press used for printing counterfeit currency notes was unearthed on Sunday at Shahid Nagar. Another report on the same subject holds that the uncovering of one or two such presses here and there only shows the tip of the iceberg. The whole country is now facing a serious challenge from such forged notes. In question are notes of 100 taka and 500 taka denominations. Even dollars and passport stamps are also counterfeited.

The situation came under review recently at a meeting presided over by the home minister. Surprisingly, however, the concerns expressed there has not been followed up, according to reports, by devising special measures needed to combat the crime. Only some allusions have been made that those apprehended in connection with the trading of counterfeit notes

NAM Steps up its Claims

by Nilratan Halder

The NAM's case deserves to get a fair hearing at the UN. These countries must not be forced to retrograde. For they are pleading for economic and social justice for their peoples. And that is a task worth sharing by the international community

In the post-Cold War era the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) can hardly expect offers of overtures from the rival camps of the past bi-polar world. The member-countries of the movement were apparently conscious of this emerging reality and that might have prompted them to push the summit schedule just prior to the United Nations' 50th anniversary celebration. Fresh from the Cartagena Summit, the leaders of the 113-member strong NAM body therefore get an opportunity to advance their causes. However, one measure of their success — or should we call failure? — is reflected in the scanty and at times deliberately deviated coverage of the event by Western media. There was a subtle attempt to pass it off as a non-event. Specially, news agencies excelled in the art of misplacing the focus. For example, one report credited to agencies — look, not even a particular news service — has this much to say that in the slum-dominated city of Cartagena, Colombia, where the inhabitants have only 100 US dollars as annual income, the NAM summit has almost entirely been ignored by its average citizens. This is simply outrageous. No journalist

from the developing countries in his wildest dream would resort to such outlandish attempt of character assassination.

If this is not enough guide to the Western view on a premier body of the aspiring nations concerned with their own independent and well-justed neutral stance, what else! True, the member-countries must be ready to take much of the blame for the movement getting weakened. It certainly lacks the personality, vision and spirit of men like Nehru, Nasser and Tito. The globalisation of markets across the world has failed to discover a political complementarity. Now there is the dawning of a realisation that in a unipolar world, the political and military hegemony is giving way to an economic colonisation. Belying the earlier expectation that the Cold War's culmination would release from the military budget a huge fund for financing development programmes in the poor nations, the World Bank and other in-

ternational institutions are facing an unprecedented fund shortage to support such economic activities the world over. Also has come the realisation that to get a fair economic deal in the bargain, political leverage is most essential. So the NAM summit has sought to reach a consensus stand on various economic and political issues that set the developing world apart from the developed parts.

At the summit, dissenting voices — such as Benazir Bhutto's on the question of expanding the UN Security Council or the rows between India and Pakistan over Kashmir issue — have been given undue prominence. While the real issues have been down-played. Even then the essential truth is that the NAM members are in favour of more democratisation of the UN. They are fed up with the imposition of will of big nations on small ones and that too through the Security Council. They resent — and reasonably so — such a use of the Security Council in the

name of international opinion. The calls for reform of the UN have come from many quarters but none is expected to be so vociferous as the one from the NAM. For involved here are the most basic interests of Asia, Africa and Latin America — particularly the less developed countries of these regions. The need for establishing a new economic order has been strongly felt and that has prompted them to bargain for a greater say at the UN.

Right to information and transfer of technology have so far remained elusive for these poor countries. The starting point should be here to bring the lop-sided international economy in order. Next on the list ought to be the international loan repayment and debt servicing. A report carried by this newspaper the other day has pointed out that external debt-servicing is expected to outweigh the inflow of aid. Developing countries elsewhere will similarly feel the pain, thanks to a tighter and

inward-looking monetary and aid policy by the donor countries. The emerging political conservatism appears to do immense harm to the developing countries' markets that have just started opening up.

Now the question is what will happen if the NAM's plea for power sharing at the UN gets rebuffed? Economic and trade blocs at the regional level have already signalled the development of mechanism for self-preservation and protection of interests. Can the clash of interests between the developed and developing nations see the emergence of a new conservatism on the economic front too? Well, you never know. The West did not abandon the expansion of its military alliance, the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation), even though the Warsaw Pact has become a thing of the past. It is such unequal treatment that gives rise to phenomenon like Hitler. The seed of the Second World War was sown in the undignified ceasefire agreement for

the Germans. The will to dominate and wield unrivalled power has been at the root of much of the world's travail.

Even if the national ego of some country or other — when hurt — does not go to the extent of beginning another war with the aim of exacting revenge for the perpetual humiliation, the rise of small dictators like Saddam, Abacha or Ershad cannot be ruled out. This obviously goes to oppose the letters and spirit of a free world. Inequality and injustice sponsored or even condoned by the international community do manifest themselves at national level. Once that is allowed to happen, the quality of life falls beyond retrieval.

The NAM's case deserves to get a fair hearing at the UN. These countries must not be forced to retrograde. For they are pleading for economic and social justice for their peoples. And that is a task worth sharing by the international community. The gap is unbearably wide and still yawning. It has to come to a tolerable level so that the world can claim to have built a civilisation where its human face is not outdone by its technological and scientific achievements.

Early General Elections on Turkish Horizon

by Arshad-uz Zaman

The real unknown is the Welfare Party (RP) with its strong Islamic orientation in a country whose constitution is secular. In the Municipal polls last year RP made a strong showing. Will it be able to repeat that performance in the General Elections?

WITH the surprise break up of the four year old coalition Government led by Turkey's first lady Prime Minister Tansu Ciller, the road appears to have opened for early General Elections. General elections are due in exactly one year but there is consensus now that elections may take place no later than next spring.

Turkey has been ruled by a coalition Government for the last four years. In the elections held in 1991 True Path Party (DYP) led by Suleyman Demirel became the largest party in the parliament with 182 seats. Motherland Party (ANAP) led by Mesut Yilmaz obtained 96 seats and Yilmaz became the leader of the Opposition. Republican People's Party with 65 seats came third and formed coalition with DYP. The pro Islamic Welfare Party (RP) with 38 seats came fourth. The other seats of the 852 member Parliament were shared by mainly right wing parties and Democratic Left Party (DSP) of the former Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, who won 10 seats.

In spite of stresses and strains the coalition led first by Suleyman Demirel (now President) and for last two years by Tansu Ciller, has functioned reasonably smoothly. Although both partners have made concessions to make the coalition work, a vocal minority within CHP has ceaselessly campaigned for quitting the coalition.

A General Congress of the CHP was held in the beginning of September and 57 year old Deniz Baykal, who

has a 26 year political career including ministership in the seventies within the Government of Bulent Ecevit, easily defeated his only rival Murat Karayalcin. After obtaining full powers from his party his first order of business was to decide whether to continue the coalition or not. After a three hour long meeting with his coalition partner Prime Minister Tansu Ciller, Baykal announced, 'the coalition has ended the life of this parliament has ended'. He stated that his party was ready for early elections.

In making this dramatic announcement Baykal has taken the wind out of the sails of the noisy left wing of his party. Through this decision he has also brought his party back to its traditional centre left voters. By sheer coincidence labour unrest in Turkey has started and there are a mounting number of workers choosing the path of strikes. The number of striking workers is rapidly reaching the half a million mark. The only party lending a sympathetic ear to the workers is CHP and Baykal will have his hands free now that he is out of the Government. Labour unrest is closely linked with Turkey's privatization programme, demanded by the IMF, and it raises fears of loss of jobs by workers.

Of all the problems that

continue to plague Turkey, the war in South Eastern region is the most critical.

In eleven years of war between the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) and Turkish Security Forces more than 12000 have died, countless thousands injured, the whole region giving the look of a wasteland. Kurds have moved out of their villages by the hundreds of thousands and settled in Western and Southern Turkey. Kurds are a 20 per cent of Turkish population. Turkey is a multi ethnic society and over the centuries they have fused in today's Turk. Traditionally Kurds have voted for the CHP including the last elections in 1991. They have felt let down by CHP and formed their own political party, which was banned by the present Government and several Kurdish members of parliament thrown in jail and facing trial. Indeed the Kurdish population of the large South Eastern region watch carefully Baykal before throwing their lot once again with CHP. Wooing back the Kurdish voters to CHP may be the most difficult and delicate task awaiting its new leader Deniz Baykal. By precipitating the break up of the coalition he has taken a calculated gamble — either make his CHP a large party as was done in the mid seventies by his then political mentor Bulent Ecevit or face political

oblivion.

If Baykal is facing difficult choices the situation of Prime Minister Tansu Ciller is not an enviable one. This Economics Professor turned politician, an attractive lady in a man's world, has faced continuously sniping within her own party. DYP the largest centre right party, will it go to the pools with a leader whose political life is barely five years old? At the present moment there does not appear anyone to challenge her leadership. She will need skill, resourcefulness and luck to meet this most serious challenge of her short political career. She has barely a month to form a new coalition, a prospect which does not look hopeful. She will be left with the choice of a minority Government, whose task will be to take the country to early general elections.

DYP and ANAP are like two sides of the same coin. The large business community and the thriving middle class are largely supporters of these two centre right parties. Voters in Turkey have given an edge to right over left. Pressure will mount from rich capitalist class for the two centre right parties to mend their fences. DYP has nearly doubled the number of seats in the parliament compared to ANAP. Municipal polls have shown that the popularity of DYP remains pretty much intact. As elec-

tion day draws closer pressure is bound to mount on both leaders so that they appear on a single platform. Given the personality of the two leaders this prospect does not look bright either.

The real unknown is the Welfare Party (RP) with its strong Islamic orientation in a country whose constitution is secular. In the Municipal polls last year RP made a strong showing. Will it be able to repeat that performance in the General Elections? RP leader Necmettin Erbakan sounds continuously upbeat, which must be an election ploy. In any case his party evokes strong sentiments in this secular state, whose Muslim population is deeply religious.

The Governmental crisis came when Turkey's entry into the European Customs Union is about to be decided. This is an essential first step before she becomes full member of the powerful European Union (EU). She has waited for this for thirty years and the Strasbourg Parliament in Strasbourg in France is due to vote on this issue in December next. Turkey was supposed to continue her democratization reforms. Turkey has followed her foreign policy objective of joining EU with single minded tenacity. The collapse of the coalition Government may delay Turkey's entry into the Customs Union

unless Turkey can devise another formula.

The collapse of the Soviet Union nearly four years ago and the emergence of new independent Turkic states — kith and kin of Turkey — opened a whole new world for Turkey. Turkey has seized that opportunity with both hands. Summit of six Turkic heads of States has become an annual affair. A Black Sea Cooperation Agreement (BSEC) comprising states around the Black Sea and the neighbouring states has been set up in Istanbul. From the periphery of Europe, Turkey has suddenly emerged as a vibrant state in a new world.

The war against the PKK is undoubtedly the most serious problem facing Turkey. The region has been under Martial Law for many years. Turkish media routinely reports communiques from military headquarters of the region of daily deaths which run into double figure. An awareness is growing that this question will have to be dealt with in a political way. It would be interesting to see how the political parties tackle this question in the next election campaign.

Through a single act Deniz Baykal, the obscure local politician has appeared on centre stage of Turkish politics. As Turkey moves towards the twentyfirst century with a vastly expanded role, it is anybody's guess, who will lead this nation. Meanwhile, the presence of the seasoned politician Suleyman Demirel in the heights of Chankaya Palace provides the indispensable stability to this state.

To the Editor...

Curfew and democracy

Sir, Few years have passed since we have gone through 'curfew' in Bangladesh. In the past, we have experienced curfew imposed on us by the military government's or others. But recently a politician has said that they would create a situation of curfew in the country if the party in power does not handover the power to a neutral caretaker government for conducting the next elections. At present the politicians of Bangladesh have not reached any consensus on this issue and people of the country are bewildered over the happenings. They have nothing to do but to accept the 'hartal calls' or 'meetings' whosever is proclaiming.

I am an ignorant of political terms and also afraid of connotations of the word 'curfew' I wanted to know the meaning and efficacy of curfew in a democratic country. I wonder how it would be possible to create curfew-situation by any political party in a democratic

during wars when persons of enemy nationality must be in their homes after certain hours.

As such we have no wartime situation prevailing in the country. Neither we are children, nor persons of enemy nationality are staying in Bangladesh. I have failed to understand how and why anybody will have to create curfew-situation in the country. As it is political parties who are giving programmes to realise their demands, we all believe that the legitimacy of a government depends on elections being free and fair it is an important step toward the democratic process. It is a must to achieve effective democracy where people also should be endowed with unalienable rights of life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness. An important quality of democracy is its emphasis on trying to enable people to act on the basis of understanding and agreement instead of force.

Dialogue, negotiation, bargaining and ultimately voluntary cooperation are operation

Inability to ensure agreement among the political leaders often sharpened divisions, aroused suspicious among various classes, political parties and their leaders.

Politicians of Bangladesh I am sure are aware of all these still over the years, opposition parties are using hartal to demonstrate their protests. It has become an established method to obtain political benefits from the government. Against their apparent will they are compelled to go for those programmes because they believe that they have no other alternatives to pressurise the government to concede to their demands.

But somehow time has come for the opposition to find other ways besides hartal to show their protests and to put pressure on the party in power avoiding economic destruction and development of the country. All the political parties should re-think about solving this problem without creating curfew-like situation in the country. After all, today's opposition are day

men involved in raping Marjina in Chuadanga would probably not have happened for fear of death sentence. The delay has encouraged the criminals more. Let the authorities wake up and for once take the right step now and forthwith. Justice delayed is justice denied.

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Time to be realistic

Sir, Your thoughtful comments on the present situation dated 01.10.95 and 08.10.95 with suggestions contained in them are commendable exercise in persuading the contending parties, the government and the opposition, to come to a negotiated settlement for the sake of free and fair election.

Peace and survival of democracy, the spirit of which will be victory of both sides and result in a win-win situation not win-lose one. This is a very healthy approach to

Many like me in the country would like to see a negotiated settlement of the present crisis, before it is too late and to quote Dr Yunus, a point of no-return is reached.

For some time past there had been going on in certain circles a campaign first in whispers which now have become a crescendo that the opposition demand for a neutral and caretaker government to conduct elections is absurd and unachievable. An English weekly noted for its support to every autocratic and undemocratic regime has taken a lead in this respect publishing articles, the tone and tenor of which is that the solution to present crisis is the third force to take over the reins of government to conduct elections though there is in fact existence of no third force, there being only two forces patriotic and unpatriotic ones.

The hardening of the attitude of the Prime Minister speaks a lot about the capturing of the centre stage by the

agency or the third force to take over the powers of the government even for even such limited period as required for smooth conduct of election. Our political institutions are quite adequate to come to grips with the present crisis given the goodwill and sincerity among the politicians of both sides of the divide.

It is known to all of us that Iran waged a war for about a decade with Iraq but elections were not postponed using the war as an excuse. Sri Lanka's violent civil war, among others, claimed the lives of its incumbent president and a presidential candidate, but elections were held in time. But in this country whenever there is a crisis which is in fact a sign of living and dynamic society, some conspirators and enemies of the people and democracy want to fish in the troubled waters for personal gains. They are active now as they had been in 1971, 1975 and in 1982. They are nobody's friends and they don't