

## Inflationary Dilemma

The current rate of inflation is said to be around 8 per cent. This is 2.84 per cent higher than the closing figure of 1994-95. Conventionally speaking, we may not take fright of this; because, an annual increase of 3 to 4 per cent is regarded as 'tolerable'.

There is, however, cause for worry, as far as we can see. In our assessment, inflation is clearly at a watershed itching to expose the artificial props and defy the simulated controls. What is to be noted in particular is the curving up of the food price index, the key factor behind the determination of the overall rate of inflation. The stability of food prices was upset two years ago due to successive crop failures and, has since been only be-moaned.

Food imports carry an element of inflation into the country's economy as these are made in dollar which enjoys an edge in exchange value over the taka.

Besides, the high election-time expenses are staring us in the face. These are bound to push the rate of inflation further up. A political decision is needed in this sensitive area. A lot of unearned income is sure to be at play. Bangladesh Bank should know where the safety vaults need to be put so that we are spared the ordeal of stepping on a run-away inflation.

Bangladesh Bank clearly faces a dilemma in employing the tool of exchange rate adjustment for holding down the inflationary pressure. India and Pakistan have devalued their currencies to an extent that Bangladesh seems hard-put to do under its present circumstances. If taka is further devalued the cost of imports will rise. Apparently, exports will be facilitated; but then consider the fact of importing inputs at higher costs for the manufacture of garments and their export. Yet, to be able to compete with our trading rivals we have little choice but to bring our currency at par with theirs eventually.

The central bank is neither in a position at this time to make the taka a free floating currency so that it finds its own value in the exchange rates market. For, it could then have spin-off effects on inflation and the foreign currency reserve.

In the ultimate analysis, unhindered productivity and effective expenditure-control promise to act as powerful safeguards against inflation.

## Cricketing Glory

Three wins in three matches and that too over a side likely to carry the baton of the Caribbean cricket, one that has for the most part of its cricketing history remained at the top of the game. Of the three outings, two were fought on unequal terms — at least from the point of view of the players' age — but the result of the third match played on an even keel must be taken seriously. The Bangladesh Under-19 boys fully deserved the victory for their superior batting, bowling and fielding. This victory is sweeter still as we come to know that the visiting team had just completed a successful tour of Pakistan before it took on Bangladesh — its second international experience.

Here is a simple equation that fills our hearts with pride and should make us convinced of a dream-like prospect. These victories indeed augur well for our cricket. Cricket has every reason to prosper on our soil if it gets the right kind of patronage.

There are, however, a few things that deserve careful consideration. Our national team's performance still falls far short of the international test playing standards. Our failures in successive ICC tournaments should be a rude awakening to this fact. Even the national side's recent visit to India where it competed in the Moin-ud-dowla Cup, ended in its early exit.

This is not to undermine our boys' achievements. If Sri Lanka's phenomenal rise in world cricket is any guide, these young cricketers are surely destined for greater glories. The victory has served as a morale booster. Now these are what we need: planned and systematic development of cricketing facilities, intense performance-oriented coaching and more and more international exposures for our cricketers. Sri Lanka had embarked on such a programme. Her today's test players are the products of that programme. It is better to take up a long-term programme with more investment in young cricketers talents than marvel at occasional successes and rest on our oars.

## Snarling Bus Terminal

The bus terminal occupation syndrome is back in Syedabad with full virulence — thanks to the rivaling godfathers calling shots from behind the scene for the followers. Their supporters went on a rampage on the weekly day of prayer — Friday — exchanging gunshots and hurling bombs at each other. Ruhul Amin, a worker was felled by a bullet, more than 50 persons sustained injuries, four dozen vehicles were damaged and several shops emptied by looting. Among the injured predictably were innocent passers-by and commuters who were caught in the cross-fire extending over the whole of Syedabad-Jatrabari area.

According to some reports, the violence erupted as a backlash of a long-simmering conflict between the supporters of a local BNP MP and those of the Jatrabari ward commissioner. If this be the case then one wonders why the two could not sort out the differences at their level; for, they must have been aware of the consequences of leaving such things, even unwittingly, to their impetuous and fiercely loyal followers.

None has the right to bring traffic to a standstill or endanger others' lives well beyond the perimeter of their group interests. The very magnitude of such lawlessness should automatically draw the police into action, a bold professional action, without any fear or favour.

# McNamara Visits Vietnam: Lessons of History

*Mr McNamara has the wisdom to swallow his own pride and admit the mistakes that he and his government made in turning the fields, forests and villages of a poor country into an inferno. He wants mankind to learn from the lessons of history.*

ROBERT S McNamara's career is a mixture of achievements in diverse fields. Before he was picked up by President John F Kennedy for appointment as secretary of defense in his cabinet, he was a successful executive in the Ford Motor Company. Known as a "whiz kid" he applied modern computer technology in the decision-making process of the company which was stream-lined and modernized to face national and international competition. McNamara served as the Pentagon chief from 1961 to 1968 under presidents John F Kennedy and Lyndon B Johnson. He is believed to have played a crucial role during the first seven years of one of the bloodiest wars in this century. After leaving the government, McNamara served as the president of the World Bank for a decade. The Bank's size and operations were not only vastly expanded during his tenure, its philosophy also underwent profound change. No one can deny that in his own way McNamara has left an imprint in contemporary history. One may justifiably wonder why does this man, the architect of the policy of escalation of the Vietnam war, visit the country which suffered so much because of his policy? Is it merely curiosity on his part to revisit the scene of his "crime"? His visit to Vietnam, to my mind, is an interesting footnote to the history of the 70's decade and deserves to be examined for its significance.

Mr McNamara has become the centre of a controversy in the United States by expressing his regrets for the Vietnam war, calling it a "tragic

mistake." His recently published book entitled "In Retrospect", has caused widespread indignation among the Vietnam veterans, many of whom believe that they fought a patriotic war to save the "free world" and made great sacrifices for a just cause. McNamara, they feel, has betrayed them by questioning the moral basis of the war. It may be recalled that McNamara was secretary of defense under president Kennedy when the United States was drawn into the war. The direct involvement began later during president Johnson's presidency but McNamara was the secretary of defense at the time. The incident on 4 August 1964 off the coast of North Vietnam when Vietnamese coast guard units allegedly fired at the US destroyer Maddox figured in the discussions in the meeting between the two old adversaries, General Vo Nguyen Giap and Robert S McNamara during the latter's visit to Hanoi early this month. McNamara wanted to know what actually happened on 4 August 1964. On that particular day, Gen Giap said, "There was absolutely nothing". Based on reports of alleged attack, president Johnson ordered retaliatory air strikes. Three days later the US Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, escalating the war to a level from which there was no turning back. Though Gen Giap confirmed that there was an attack on 2 August, there was, according to him, no attack on 4th August. Does it there-

fore mean that the reported attack on August 4 was fictitious? In hindsight it seems certain that the second episode on 4 August was fabricated by the Pentagon, probably under orders at the highest level, in order to line up the US Congress behind the president's policy. After listening to Gen Giap McNamara said he was now "99 and ninety-nine hundredths per cent sure it did not occur." Thus a major phase in the war was initiated on the

men and spend vast treasures to win a war which, in retrospect, was not only not winnable but so unnecessary. In vain did the nation make such sacrifices and inflict such severe punishment on a small and poor nation. Americans were obsessed with the domino theory. They passionately believed that if Vietnam went under the communists, the rest of Asia will also slip out of the orbit of the "free world." It was president Reagan who much

their country. The perceptions of the two nations about the nature of the conflict was thus quite different. Today, barely one and a half decade after the end of the war, one can see the futility of the whole conflict. While Mr McNamara's visit is a positive step in the process of cementing the friendship between the two nations, it is also a recognition of a changed perspective and a completely new international climate. In a strange irony of fate, Americans are once again rushing to Vietnam but this time they are going there to invest and not to fight. In a total reversal of roles, Vietnamese businessmen are embracing Americans as long lost brothers because both sides believe that there is profit to be made through trade and investment! The domino theory has been thrown into the dust bin of history.

Remarks made by both Gen Giap and Mr McNamara suggests that both of them are keen to draw lessons from the bitter history of their tangled relations. According to press reports, the Vietnamese government has tentatively agreed to hold a conference on the Vietnam war next year. At a joint news conference with McNamara, the director-general of the Vietnamese Institute for International Relations, Mr Dao Huy Ngoc said, "We all welcome the initiative for having a conference next autumn in Hanoi." The meeting would "examine the reasons which led to the war, why it was not

possible to end it earlier, what necessary lessons we could draw from it." Key figures in the conflict would meet during the conference, but the organizers have not yet spoken with them.

In looking back to the past, McNamara mused "The 20th century was the bloodiest century. One hundred sixty million human beings were killed by war between nations and among nations. Is it what we wish to repeat in the 21st century?" To fulfill its objective, this conference, McNamara said, "would require major efforts to put together a documentary base. I would be happy to ship to Vietnam all of the documents of accumulated and that were the basis of my book. But we need counter-part documents." If actually held, the conference will be a unique one. It would be fascinating to see the war from the two opposite angles. How did they evaluate events such as the bombing of Hanoi or the bombing of Cambodia? There was admittedly error of judgement in escalating the war but who made the error? Why could not the war be ended when both sides seemed to want it? Was it Nixon's bellicosity or vanity and pride? Mr McNamara has the wisdom to swallow his own pride and admit the mistakes that he and his government made in turning the fields, forests and villages of a poor country into an inferno. He wants mankind to learn from the lessons of history. Looking at the scene of carnage in Bosnia one wonders if all this talk about history is mere rhetoric. There is no evidence that mankind has ever learned from history.

## ON THE RECORD

by Shah A M S Kibria



basis of a false and probably concocted story.

Mr McNamara's visit to Vietnam shows that values and priorities of nations change with the passage of time and often the change is so fundamental that the earlier policy appears to be pointless to a later generation. In the height of the cold war during the 50's decade, the memory of the Korean war was still fresh in mind. The menace of communism looked large on the horizon. The United States believed that the fate of the so-called "free world" depended on the outcome of the war in Vietnam. The threat seemed so imminent to them that American leaders did not hesitate to sacrifice the lives of thousands of their young

later popularized the term "evil empire" but the idea had already taken firm root. In such a jaundiced world view, a country can either be a friend or a foe and non-alignment was immoral.

The assumption underlying the domino theory was that the Asian nations in East and South East Asia had no will of their own and that they were mere passive pawns which will all fall under communism like dominoes if nudged by the fall of even one country. It was of course a totally mistaken belief. Actually the Vietnamese believed that they were fighting a nationalist war — a war of liberation against neo-colonialist occupation forces. They were fighting to drive away foreign invaders from

# It's Crisis of Democracy

by Nilratan Halder

*In the days to come the imported violence into our society will have its backlash on politics in turn. Such is the poetic justice of human civilisation. The thugs we set after our rivals may one day turn against us. The victims of our political animosity become our nemesis. Politics of revenge also turns into retributive justice.*

available here and are likely to fall in bad hands. We are not quite unfamiliar with the politics of vengeance and killings. In fact, the saga of bloody politics is deep-rooted, and therefore, extremely disturbing. So far the killings have remained confined within the army. Ever since the killing of the founder of this small country by a band of wayward and notorious military men, power-hungry men killed and got killed in the barracks — indeed quite a number of them. Civilians had no part in these killings. Not because some of them were less interested in power, but because they had no control over the means of large-scale fire power.

Now that equation has radically changed. Not at all because the civilians have established full control over the military establishment as is done in a developed democracy. Rather, the army is no longer interested in meddling in politics. Particularly, the international political environment is not even remotely supportive of military rule. Look how the military rulers in Nigeria and Myanmar (Burma) are looked down upon and have to bear

with international isolation. So it appears we have passed that stage where the Generals took over power whenever they thought the time propitious. Even if that possibility is removed, we have no reason for smugness. The threat destabilising government or political process by means of violence however does not recede there.

Badruddoza Chowdhury is no prime minister, nor were those whose residences were targeted before. But such attacks are acting as a good dress rehearsal for further attempts on lives of top leaders in the country. If the military has abandoned the violence, others are there to make good use of the recess. This is why such light attacks should not be taken lightly. Any let-up may over the years prove highly costly for national politics or even for the nation. Like the original sin, the assassination of Bangabandhu has so long weighed heavily on the nation. Once we have come out of that dark phase of politics we must do everything in our capability to stifle any possibility of a spin-off of political violence at the terrorist level. An assassin's bullets or bombs must not be allowed to take

the better of reason, democratic practice and sound political judgement.

Signs are manifestly disturbing. Our society in general was not unduly violence-prone. It was politics that brought in an overdose of violence. So the modern brand of politics largely reached our common mass in a distorted form. All the virtues of democracy — human rights, individual liberty and equality, and freedom of expression — have failed to touch their lives in a positive way. Instead of society's sobering influence acting on politics, it is the latter that has increasingly been leaving its deleterious impacts on the former. The real crisis of democracy in fact lies there. In the days to come the imported violence into our society will have its backlash on politics in turn. Such is the poetic justice of human civilisation. The thugs we set after our rivals may one day turn against us. The victims of our political animosity become our nemesis. Politics of revenge also turns into retributive justice.

Hence the need for warding off the potential threat from hatred-infested politics. We cannot say that the

mainstream political parties enjoy the best of relations among or between them. And there are obviously forces who do not want to see any improvement in such relations. They surely enjoy fishing in troubled water. In an environment of political mistrust, it is not at all surprising that the saboteurs would very much want to take their chances. No matter if that is at the cost of national interests. When the prime minister and the Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina are building on their correspondence — if not entirely on mutual trust — bomb attacks on front-line leaders of either side can have a chain reaction, throwing into turmoil everything that has been achieved so far. It will matter, if at all, only marginally who threw the bombs first. The real issue will get out of focus. That is what politics of intimidation or calculated sabotage is all about. Instead of fostering a healthy democratic culture, it ends up in political violence and blood-letting in society. The incongruous and unhappy relationship between our society and polity is fast receding. Both find a meeting point in violence.

This, if not anything else, should give our politicians sleepless nights. Governance is increasingly becoming a difficult task. In democracy it should not happen. What the politician will govern in the end, if an undisciplined, clamorous and defying society starts posing to be a greater challenge with every passing day? Politics of non-transparency has to pay a heavy price ultimately and a long-term benefit of democratic culture should not be sacrificed for some immediate and partisan gains. Attacks, though not deadly yet, of any form on the physical safety and security of political opponents are a clear breach of the unwritten transparency rule. They set the tone of politics and also of social order. It is because of this we must not only condemn such attacks on either side of the political divide, but also demand that the police get into their job of nabbing the culprits and their bosses behind. Politics does not tolerate bending of laws or manipulation of facts. It simply explodes in tragic consequences. Time is for us to admit this truth and reality.

Let the political process based on tolerance, fairplay, transparency and accountability prosper. The concept of Western democracy is among us for quite some time. It has turned people in the West sober. It should not turn us violent and indiscrete. It is time we assimilated it for our all-round nourishment.

## To the Editor...

### Relaxed Hartal

Sir, I would be more convinced of the sincerity of the Opposition — their so-called commitment to the development of Bangladesh, and to the welfare of the people — if they had announced a "relaxed" hartal for reasons other than the upcoming visit of the West Indies Under-19 Cricket team.

Why could they not have relaxed this hartal (or previous hartals) to allow garment workers, school-going children, and other poor men and women, living hand-to-mouth on daily wages, a safe journey? Apparently, only the "cricket-loving" youth deserve a reprieve.

Gretchen Antelman  
Gulshan.

### Injustice on innocent people

Sir, What, the workers of Mokbulur Rahman Jute Mill at Sitakund did on November 9, 1995, in demand of the withdrawal of lay-off is unacceptable. It is alleged that some 2000 Jute Mill workers played havoc on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway, removed railway fishplates upto 3km at Sitakund, damaged a good number of vehicles and put up roadblocks, which re-

sulted in severed connection between Chittagong and other parts of the country for 14 hours! One can imagine the plight of the people who were travelling through that highway. Those who were waiting for their arrival at home passed time in anxiety and not knowing what is the cause of delay.

This sort of incident is most deplorable. Why should common-people suffer without any faults on their part? The conflict is between the jute mill authority and its employees; it is their headache, they should resolve it without involving innocent persons. It is very funny that in our country, when something goes wrong anywhere, the brunt of it comes upon general public. This attitude is most horrible and must be changed.

We want to ask the jute Mill authority, why they did not take steps at the right time, they must have known about the dissatisfaction of the workers and must have guessed that something of this sort was going to happen. Then why they let it happen? Do we have to suffer for their negligence? They could have given the assurance earlier, which was given after the incident and this could have spared the people from so much trouble.

It is a must that authori-

ties of every establishment never allow disputes to come to such a point that heat will scorch persons who are not involved in any way.

Nur Jahan  
East Nasirabad,  
Chittagong.

### What is sacred?

Sir, This refers to "The Constitution and the Opposition" a letter written by Mr Ibne Ahmed on 3rd November, 1995 in your daily. He writes "Therefore the constitution and the rules framed thereunder (by Jatiya Sangsad) are as much sacred and pure as they are legal and just."

A constitution is considered to be legal for a particular country for a particular time but it may not be sacred or pure at all by any standard for all times. For example, in a political uprising in 1975, some opposition leaders were forcibly taken into jail and killed without any application of the existing law of the country. Subsequently a law (Indemnity Act) was enacted by the Jatiya Sangsad to protect the killers. So protection of killers (Indemnity Act) is a part of the constitution. Is it sacred or pure? I am ashamed of it. You are not made for the law but the law is made for you. What value

system you are asking me to uphold?

I am not a member of any political party but can see that the present political crisis is not a constitutional one. The Constitution was made a scapegoat. The crisis is due to lack of mutual trust and confidence between ruling and opposition parties, more particularly among a very few top leaders. Obviously the ruling party should take effective steps, visible and transparent to masses, to initiate the task of building the process of trust and confidence as a part of their sacred duty. Whatever may be the outcome of the process or lack of it, the ruling party shall bear the major share.

Sunil Sagar  
Mirpur, Dhaka.

### BTV's news

Sir, Television is the most effective medium for communicating important news and views. It is, therefore, desired that whatever is telecast through this audio-visual electronic medium for the viewers and listeners pass through a strict process of scrutiny and careful editing. But I was taken aback when I listened to the Bengali news bulletin telecast at 5 pm on 10-11-95. The first head-

line of the said bulletin was somewhat like this — "Commonwealth Summit in Auckland, the capital of New Zealand starts from today....."

What was disappointing to the viewers and listeners was the utter carelessness of the concerned authority shown to such an internationally important news item. It was more astonishing when the same news was again telecast at 8 o'clock in the night on the same day and in the same manner. Will anybody please enlighten, if Auckland has recently been named as the capital of New Zealand in place of Wellington?

Imtiaz Ahmed  
Trainee Officer  
National Bank Ltd. Dhaka.

### An outburst!

Sir, Would some one please inform the Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition that the nation is SICK and TIRED of their unceasing hostility towards each other.

We want to live in peace and continue our normal lives, without the fear of being attacked in the street because some political party with an axe to grind, wants to come to power. We are sick of such politi-

cians (both government and opposition) as perhaps did not have enough funds to purchase a motorcycle, but a few years after coming to power might have purchased textile mills, luxury jeeps, and houses at Gulshan or Baridhara.

We are sick of the opposition members claiming to be saviours of the nation calling "hartals" on the pretext that it is their fundamental right to protest, guaranteed by the constitution. Would someone please remind them that it is our constitutional right to live and work in Bangladesh, without being attacked or stripped naked.

We are sick of the opposition telling us that they are upholding the people's interests, and we are sick of the government telling us that they are the sole protectors of the constitution.

It seems at present that our poor nation has more than its share of politicians but does not seem to have any patriots among them.

The present bunch of MPs should realise that considering their present record, if the electorate find any other alternative, let next election come, none of them (hopefully) will be voted to power.

Sick  
Uttara, Dhaka.