

People-to-People Approach

We welcome the homing in on the Ganges water question by top environmentalists of India and Bangladesh who are leading the campaign called People's Initiative for Water sharing. The issue has not so far been amenable to solution because of political overtones reflective more of governmental frailties than anything else. Hence, it is to the peoples of India and Bangladesh that this is now being taken in order to induce a mutually sympathetic realisation and appreciation of each other's environmental concerns and demands arising out of the Farakka Barrage as the test case. If the public on both sides are sufficiently sensitised political decision-making will be that much easier. The attempt to prise open the dormant popular will has, therefore, our full support.

Our optimism is born of the Patna seminar on "Ganga, Himalaya and Water", held a month ago, which highlighted the denial of water to Bangladesh before a receptive Indian audience. Within a month of each other, has been staged a "meet the press" programme in Dhaka on Sunday with Kuldip Nayar insisting that Dhaka get an equal share of the Ganges water.

There are information gaps in India about the environmental degradation in Bangladesh, extent of her suffering and the quanta of her water requirement. For their part, Bangladeshis occasionally sit up and take note of the news emanating from India that West Bengal or some other states have not been quite a beneficiary of the Farakka Barrage. That public opinions on both sides can have an underlying commonality is being glossed over in a mutually negative mind-set.

This must change through a greater sharing of information with a positive content, authentically generated and interpreted by water experts, media people, environmentalists and top-order intellectuals of the country. When this starts happening, it would not be long before an avalanche of public opinion exerts irresistible pressure on the government of the day.

The People's Initiative has a tremendous potential to help remove the roadblock that the water sharing issue is between Bangladesh and India as far as their bilateral relations go. A new era can dawn on Indo-Bangla ties with a mutual appreciation of problems at the people-to-people level.

Supply Dislocation

Chittagong Port is going through congestion with export and import being hampered in these peak consignment periods.

The merchandise we ship home from abroad, however, need to be brought inland as quickly as possible much the same way that exportables are required to reach the sea port terminal speedily. In-between there is a large bulk of indigenously produced goods that must make it to the local markets to cater to all sorts of demands, both consumptive as well as productivity-oriented.

To make matters worse on the supply side this year we have faced long queues at the river-crossing points of Aricha, Nagarbari and Daulatdia.

Market prices have soared. Even where these were supposed to be going down with the winter supplies, expectations seemed roundly belied. The over-all supply constraint is activating the demand to such an extent that this is threatening to push the inflation rate further up.

A serious inflationary situation is staring us in the face — exacerbated by a slow-down in the movement of goods and of national productivity in general. Then, visualise the election-related expenses round the corner, which are bound to fuel the inflation further.

We must begin to roll back the trend from where it looks reversible. Better container handling and an optimal utilisation of the space within the port area can to some extent minimise the congestion at Chittagong Port. The management aspect has equal importance as far as easing the ferry ghat hold-up goes, much of which is man-made on a closer look.

A Case for Jamdani

A nine-day long national jamdani fair began in the city on Saturday. Jamdani saris have a long tradition like that of muslin — a kind of fabric unrivalled by anything in the history of clothes. Jamdani is exquisite but not as fine as muslin. It has, however, an edge over muslin in that it is affordable by common people whereas its superior counterpart was only meant for fabulously rich people — often the families of kings and emperors. As for the costly variety, there is a fast emerging rich segment of customers who literally scramble for these.

An environment-friendly attire, it enjoys a tremendous patronage of the ladies across the border. Evidently, the sari has a sizeable market in India, which unfortunately remains very largely unutilised.

Jamdani, now regrettably facing a stiff competition from synthetic saris, indeed has the potential to flourish if we can capture the Indian and Pakistani markets. The artistry, texture, design and user-friendliness of jamdani are the winning points for it. Let the fair be a step towards a wider campaign for its promotion abroad.

THE victory in the latest parliamentary elections of the Russian Communist Party led by Gennady Zyuganov is a link in the chain of events sweeping that vast country — the largest in the world — ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union four years ago. The election results will be viewed in the West with undisguised concern.

According to the latest available results, the Communist Party, which has come first, has obtained a quarter of the votes and bagged so far one third of the seats in the Duma (Russian parliament). The ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democrat Party came second with 11 per cent of votes and President Boris Yeltsin's Party "Our Home is Russia" came third with 9.6 per cent votes.

Two years ago, Zhirinovskiy's appearance on the world media with a stunning victory on a platform of xenophobia, had sent shock waves throughout the world. A world wide campaign was launched to contain this extraordinary phenomenon. While attacking the West, Zhirinovskiy singled out Turkey as his special whipping boy. The Declaration of Independence by the Turkic Republics of the south and

south-east of the former Soviet Union were the favourite targets of Zhirinovskiy's fulminations.

If Zhirinovskiy could be dismissed as an ultra-nationalist, he nevertheless represented a profound malaise sweeping throughout Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Undoubtedly it was the largest single event at this fag end of the millennium, since the emergence of this giant state in 1917 following the fall of Czarist Russia. The latest election result is a sure indication that the malaise will simply not go away and is settling down on this vast land. The splintering of the Soviet Union came simultaneously with the discarding of the Communist Party, at whose door all blame was laid for every kind of ill afflicting the Soviet society. Indeed the collapse had come so suddenly that the far-flung areas (states) of the Soviet Union which occupied one sixth of the surface of the globe, were nearly incredulous and took time to adjust to the new realities.

I was a member of the

Elections in Russia

Free Market economy, although practiced for a brief tentative period, has so far failed to deliver. The Socialist system, which looked after its citizens from the cradle to the grave, proved no match for the affluence of the West

first Bangladesh Delegation, which visited the newly independent Turkic states and Moscow shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Turkic Republics had been caught off-guard and I saw that they barely had time to remove the sign boards of the Communist parties, which were housed in the

carried this message throughout the world. And the Communist Party was its indispensable arm to carry the message.

It is in the economic field that the Soviet Union had its most spectacular failure. Shortly before her collapse, the world witnessed year after year the Soviet Union

events the Soviet Union has been groping in the dark. The promise of immediate prosperity following the discarding of Communism and the Socialist system of economy, has proved a mirage. It is not the Russia alone that we witness this phenomenon of the revival of the Communist Party. In Poland not long ago we saw Lech Walesa ousted through free elections. Yet it was Walesa with his 'Solidarity Movement' in the shipyards of Gdansk, who drove the first nail in the coffin of the world Communist movement.

The events in the Soviet Union, a former superpower, have a profound meaning for the entire world and particularly for the sole superpower — USA. It is evident that the Communist Party, which had such bad odour only four years ago, has overcome that phase. In countries which practiced the single party rule — the Communist Party, which was the only organised party, is making a come back.

The great difference is that this party is returning through free elections and

not riding on the back of the state. Another reason of its come back is that the void left by her sudden demise remained unfilled. Free Market economy, although practiced for a brief tentative period, has so far failed to deliver. The Socialist system, which looked after its citizens from the cradle to the grave, proved no match for the affluence of the West.

With Russia? At this fag end of the millennium is an intriguing question before humanity. If she was relegated from the Superpower status, she is a real competitor of the USA in space and nuclear technology. She is too big to be pushed around. Whether it is the emergence of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy or Gennady Zyuganov, the phenomenon is the same — a deep seated malaise and groping for a new path. They both represent Russian nationalism.

As Russia comes to terms with her new role, which she has yet to find, the West and particularly USA will no doubt remain vigilant and ensure that the transition is not too painful. In the early sixties when Mao Zhe Dong used to taunt Khrushchev for not taking on the USA, Khrushchev countered, 'Yes, but the paper tiger has nuclear teeth'.



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

most opulent buildings. Moscow looked then forlorn and in profound gloom. Free market economy was making halting steps and elderly people, standing in deep snow, were selling bric-a-brac of all varieties.

Marxism-Leninism had come with a world-wide message of an egalitarian society full of bounty. The capital of this new universal doctrine became Moscow, which promised a new world order of plenty. The Soviet union

trooping to Washington, capital of World Capitalism and arch rival of Moscow, purchasing grain to feed the large Soviet population. Nowhere this contrast was more glaring than in that divided city of Berlin — west presenting a spectacle of bounty and the East, drabness. The collapse of the Berlin Wall brought about by the bare arms of the East Germans heralded the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Ever since these dramatic

Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed as Acting President — II

What a change in the highest seat of the government! None of the political leaders whom I met today were seen in Bangabhaban earlier. They were either not invited or if invited, they never attended

AFTER briefing the Acting President about the day's next programmes I escorted him to Bangabhaban. On the way thousands of people cheered him; many were curiously peeping to see who were sitting in the Presidential limousine. Hundreds of people gathered near the main entrance of Bangabhaban. We saw lines of cars carrying invitees for the evening reception. It suddenly turned into a great festive occasion. When I left Bangabhaban, two hours later, there was the usual empty look. At the main entrance, guards of the President's Guard Regiment gave present arm salute to the new President. We went straight to the south-western corner of the posh green lawn. Red carpet was laid up to the dais. Three Services chiefs were there to receive him. A smartly turned out contingent of the President's Guard Regiment with a pipe band was waiting for the Acting President. As Justice Shahabuddin stood in the dais the contingent commander presented arms salute while the band played the national anthem. After the salutation the Acting President inspected the guard. The simple ceremony took about seven minutes. He then went to the President's office room in the main building.

By 4:30 most of the guests arrived. First ranking leaders of all political parties, student and labour organizations, except Jatiya Party, were invited. Guests included many uninvited ones who ac-

companied their group leaders. Besides political leaders, high civil and military officers, heads of all diplomatic missions, corporation chiefs, city elite, newspaper editors, well known journalists and representatives of business and industry communities were invited. The main hall, corridor and northern veranda were almost jam-packed with guests. Sheikh Hasina and Begum Zia were accompanied by their top-ranking party leaders. I received them in the porch. Both were giving triumphant looks, they rightfully deserved to enter Bangabhaban in flying colours. As they entered, people thronged around them. When



FALL OF GENERAL ERSHAD

by Maj Gen Manzur Rashid Khan (Retd)

arrival of guests decreased we escorted the Acting President to the main hall. It was difficult to push through. All protocol, security and other considerations failed. The Acting President met both the main opposition leaders separately. He went around and met the guests and wherever possible talked with them. It was a grand occasion for the nation.

What a change in the

highest seat of the government! None of the political leaders whom I met today were seen in Bangabhaban earlier. They were either not invited or if invited, they never attended. There existed a bitter relationship between the government party and the rest except, of course, a handful of politicians led by Mr ASM Abdur Rab. It was a great get-together for many of the politicians who never saw eye to eye with their opponents. I wished a new chapter of goodwill, understanding and mutual cooperation develop between all political parties from this day. All around there were looks of happiness and new promises. I had opportunity to meet a number of national leaders and exchanged greetings. I found them appreciating the role of the Army. The reception ended with the departure of the Acting President. Some guests stayed for some time longer. When all guests left, I addressed Bangabhaban staff and congratulated them for successfully managing the re-

ception.

It was a usual dark and chilly December evening when I started walking from the main building toward my residence. A five minute walk through rows of mango and araucaria trees and then through the netted tunnel covered with thick golden shower creepers always made me feel stimulated. After state banquets, cabinet meetings and other evening or nightly appointments of Bangabhaban I rarely missed this walk. Often Lt Col Atiqur Rahman Munshi, AMSP accompanied me. I remember many such walks after former President's late departure from Bangabhaban. Atiq was accompanying me this evening. He reminded me some of my presages. Sometimes I used to express my bitter feelings on some of the former President's activities. He reminded me of some incidents which I told him while walking through this footpath. Sometimes he left Bangabhaban as late as 1:30 am in cold nights of December-January. After finishing cabinet meetings around 11 pm the former president used to sit in his office till late night. This was the time for his intimate or private talks or gossips with friends at home and abroad. We all used to wait for the Presi-



The two leaders, Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina with Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed

The Third View

Sir, Your 'Third View' is my first one to read. The two options you indicated are: one, Begum Zia may go ahead with elections in which her party will be the only contestant, and form an Ershad-like cabinet; and the other is, she may take steps so that all parties will take part in the coming elections and make it a credible one as the election in '91 was. Begum Zia promised that she would step down 30 days ahead of the election. The deadline is still to come. Her recent attitude is that she wants a consensus through a dialogue with the oppositions before her resignation. But the opposition, as it is comprehended, wants that she should resign first and then hold a dialogue. In fact, this is the only bone of contention. The very logic of the ruling party is that if Begum Zia resigns and none of her party men heads the government, then with whom the opposition will have a dialogue? But the opposition, though they have not yet countered the logic, are firmly sticking to their one-point demand. What is the solution, then?

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Sorry, wrong number

Sir, Somebody has got to make a move first. A fed-up man in China did. He took it to court. A right stop, no doubt. He sued the company for the sufferings caused him by printing his telephone number wrongly. The well-publicised num-

ber of his brought him a lot of troubles physically, emotionally and financially. He naturally had to turn to law for a relief from this harassment, to have his number taken off the street directory, and to get some of the losses back as well.

Good for Chinese life, by far. But, what about all such nuisances that are tormenting peaceful living in other parts of the world? Not that some kind of retaliatory or compensatory measure is not taken elsewhere: similar examples might have been known to the members of public in developed countries regarding undue disturbance in private life one way or other.

The automatic urge of the civil responsibility is: the wrong-doer must pay, no matter what. So, the right course of action against the culprit has to represent the correct sense of assessment of the misdeed, intentional or unintentional, based on educated up-to-date judgement on the act that ought to be called for as true-to-the-fact as heartbeat in order to restrain fellow humans from making others' lives miserable. Because it is only a short period for six billion earthlings is strive for happier life day by day.

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Fall of Ershad

Sir, Thanks to Major General (Retd) M R Khan for a revealing story on the fifth anniversary of the dictator's fall. For conscious and educated people of this country,

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OPINION

Admission Tests

Despite huge protests from the students, the teachers and the guardians, the government and some quarters are adamant about the abolition of admission tests at all levels. Being a concerned citizen, I would like to give them some food for thought as to why the admission tests should not go.

With a few exceptions, almost all the colleges of the country cannot complete the entire syllabus as prescribed by the board within two years duration of class XI and XII. However, a few private colleges try heart and soul to complete the same even amid harts and other disruptions. Since the students of these category of institutions are less suggestion-prone, they in general don't secure high marks in the public examinations. But it may be noted here that they occupy the majority of seats of the medical, engineering and the coveted faculties of the universities just by showing their worth in the admission tests.

After the annulment of the admission tests, the authorities concerned may have to think about a short cut for the sake of better results of the students. Everybody will be obsessed with the lone aim of securing high marks at any cost. Is that kind of perspective desirable to us? Previously the proceedings of the board authorities regarding examination of the answer scripts were alleged to be beset with corruptions. After the completion of the board examinations, the Board Office in Dhaka used to look like a fish market. A good number of people would go there in order to trace out the destination of the answer scripts of their relations. Bribery happened to be an

Ahmed Zamil

open secret there. At present, with the introduction of so-called computerisation, corruption is partially replaced by gross mistakes. How can we be sure that the monumental mistakes as committed by the 'computer-walas' in last year's HSC and this year's SSC exams won't be repeated in the years to come?

A large number of students are meted out to injustice in the board examination as the judgement very often depends on the whims of the examiners. If an answer script is separately judged by a number of examiners, a remarkable variation in judgement will come out. This anomaly can largely be removed by introducing grading system instead of marking system. Our government has no such plan whatsoever. So, is it not insane to regard the profusely erratic public examination results as the one and only criterion for admission?

The much talked-about coaching business won't stop after the banishment of the admission tests. This time the coaching centres will tantalize the school or college-going students with the promise of brilliant results in the board examinations. And, the batch-based coaching, conducted by the school and college teachers will also increase. So, the government move to curb coaching through strangling the admission tests is sure to fizzle out.

It is true that corruption is evident during the admission period in some educational institutions. But all the institutions are not of that kind. For example, it can be mentioned that the BUET

Admission Tests has so far been regarded as a fair one. Coding, computerisation and quick publication of results have raised its acceptability. Is this example too hard to be followed by the other institutions?

There is no denying the fact that the SSC and HSC examinations of India are more acceptable and higher in standard than those of ours. Despite that, the students there have to sit for an admission test after the HSC examinations in order to compete for the seats of the central government-run educational institutions. The test is known as the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE). If the admission tests are of no importance (as is considered by some people in our country) why didn't the Indians abolish them before us?

Being autonomous institutions of the universities of the country have so far ignored the government recommendations to abolish the admission tests. On the other hand, the government had thrust its hasty decision on the colleges. When the government introduced the Question Bank, nobody said a word against it. Consequently, the spectre of the question bank did much harm as it let thousands of students obtain certificates keeping aloof from the textbooks. Now the question bank is gone but to our utter surprise nobody is in the government side to bear the responsibility of this unparadigmatic mistake. So, it is better to thwart the government decisions before they abolish the university admission tests and make a complete mess like in the past. Otherwise, the students only are to suffer and nobody will come to rescue them.