

Stunning Indifference

Another last hour for political consensus on elections has slipped away. Even the miracle is left with little chance to happen.

The entire nation's feeling of being unled has hardened to a point of tearless grief, and even bitterness. In suffering have the people waited for something to happen that will save them further suffering.

There will be a post-mortem on the intent and conduct of political parties but on available evidence both sides seem equally blameworthy. And the degree here hardly matters.

The opposition will take a long time sloughing off the effect of their not putting the ultimate trust in the public for demanding justice against rigged election, if there would be one.

Well Done

The reopening of four hawkers' markets at Fulbaria in just seven weeks' time after they had been consumed by a devastating fire is a performance in a class of its own.

We are happy to know that Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Mayor Mohammad Hanif have commended each other for initiatives taken both at the personal and official levels.

The reconstruction of Bangabazar and three other markets must be seen as a sterling success against the backdrop of our general failure to deliver in various other areas.

Market Networking

Two news items concerning perishable goods have drawn our attention. One published in a Bangla daily says that carrot sells four to five kgs a taka; and the other published in this newspaper estimates that perishable items worth Tk 1 crore are now rotting inside the trucks stranded at the Aricha ghat.

As the largest sector in our economy, agricultural production has been picking up but in the absence of dependable marketing facilities this could not be translated into dividends for the growers.

That the farmers are deprived of a reasonable price for their produce is a serious disincentive to growth. When truck-loads of vegetables rot at Aricha, farmers have to sell these at a throw-away price.

THE Centre for Policy Dialogue, CPD, has been a highly innovative institutional development in order to enhance our indigenous capacity to think for ourselves.

Now CPD, through its independent review of Bangladesh's development (IRBD), has, for the first time, initiated a bold departure — an indigenous alternative — to the Country Economic Memorandum (CEM) of the World Bank.

It is a big battle that CPD has launched and it deserves not only our heartfelt congratulations but strong and steadfast support in order to establish the basic principle that we must speak for ourselves and no one else.

A Bold Initiative by CPD

If the daily loss due to strikes and hartals is US\$80 million, then potentially we have lost 100 dollars per capita in 1995. No doubt the figures are not very accurate but a much more factual analysis should be immediately carried out.

continue to be externally influenced but must not be entirely foreign driven. IRBD should enable us to bring about this necessary change. It can never be achieved through slogans and processions in the streets of Dhaka.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue so far has remained a very small organization while the independent review every year would be a monumental task calling for a cadre of professional staff members working on a full time basis.

The review itself have been exhaustive, thorough and revealing. As a result, the book published eventually by University Press Limited, includes 470 pages of excellent reading material.

style executive summary would have been worthwhile. After all, flattery through imitation can do no harm. The most revealing finding of the survey is that the GDP growth rate remained below 5 per cent per annum during the last 12 years in spite of intensive policy reforms.



Window on Asia

Shaked Latif

country during the last two calendar years. If the reforms were combined with political stability like in Malaysia, I am quite positive, Bangladesh by December 1995 would have been classified as one of the Dynamic Asian Economies, in short, DAEs.

The agricultural sector remains largely unaffected by hartal culture. Therefore, decline in rice production during the last two years is definitely a matter of serious concern. The review further mentioned that in 1993-94 both output and price of rice had fallen simultaneously.

dominates not only the crop subsector but the entire agriculture economy, so much so that promising growth of livestock, fishery and non-rice crops would not be able to generate a sizeable impact on the total sectoral growth rate within the short run of a year or two.

important input. The revised IRBD estimates clearly show that industrial production also failed to come up with high rates of growth — comparable to DAEs — and if garment factories were excluded from growth rate estimates, there seemed to be hardly any improvement from the 1980s.

In this connection, I wish to refer to certain specific findings of the Review. First, the finding that "Surge in term loan disbursement is hardly comparable to the growth in capital imports" should be viewed against the fact that a significant part of those loans constitute local capital costs such as land and building, utilities, taxes, C&F costs etc.

NEWS ANALYSIS

The Sabres of Paradise

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

earlier successful raid led by Shamyil Basayev across the Chechen border in mid-1995. This time, having drawn them away from the hospital with a number of false promises, the Russians encircled the convoy away from the Chechen border in the village of Pervomaiskaya in Dagestan.

they were being subjected to on prime time media by a ragtag small bunch of guerillas. Having had a taste of Muslim guerillas in Afghanistan, in Tajikistan and the unfinished campaign in Muslim Chechnya, the Russian military hierarchy were hell-bent on proving their manhood against Muslims dissidents at Russian tutelage.

and destruction in the manner Chechnya has been at Russian hand for over a year now? Chechens (and Dagestanis) are a freedom-loving people of long-standing. Their almost mythical spiritual leader, Imam Shamyil, fought the Russians for over 30 years almost 150 years ago. Forced into captivity by overwhelming numbers Imam Shamyil and his entire family remained in internal exile in Russia as an "honoured" guest of the Tzar.

EARLY in the morning of Monday Jan 15, 1996, Russian forces surrounding Chechen rebels holding hostages in the village of Pervomaiskaya on the borders of Chechnya and Dagestan, opened a general assault. The infantry/armour charge was preceded by an artillery barrage and rocket-firing by helicopter gunships. On the TV screens one could hear the thump/crum of shells and mortars, one could make out scurrying Russian personnel in the snow. The desolate landscape was lit with a slow burning fire and smoke swirled from a number of huts. Outnumbered almost 100 to 1, outgunned many times more than that, cut off from all supplies and support, the outcome cannot be in doubt.

To the Editor...

Photo exhibition on birds Sir, I found it hearty to note that a photo exhibition on local birds by the nature lover photographer Monwar Ahmed began on 5th January, at the National Museum in Dhaka.

of the meetings? Meanwhile it is unfortunate that the formalities to meet a key official in our country which is running under a democratic government have become too lengthy and complicated. Naturally question arises — key-officials for whom, for what? So I solemnly pray — "O, Heaven! Help us in tailoring our 'meetings' to suit our poor size."

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poor records of 1980s. A realistic assessment is called for since levels of either efficiency or honesty cannot be enhanced overnight. This leaves the service sector which is fast turning into the mainstay of GDP growth. However, the Review should make it clear that service sector is practically no sector at all. It is basically the residual of everything left behind after all feasible inclusions to the other two sectors — agriculture and industry — have been made. It is like a spoiled broth, prepared by too many cooks. The service sector needs to be broken down into subsectors like trade, transport, construction etc., and only then, meaningful sectoral growth can come to light. The most disconcerting revelation seems to be the finding based on available evidence that there had hardly been any alleviation of poverty in the 1990s. This would imply that fairly widespread efforts of Grameen Bank and NGOs failed to make any headway or at least decelerate the vicious downward spiral. The Review is cautious in its conclusions. The fact remains that it did not cover the vast efforts outside the ADP of the Government to generate income and employment for the poorest. It is now fairly well established that there are numerous instances, where the starving rural poor have at least secured their basic minimum access to a cereal based sufficiency. Why in terms of national aggregates, a positive outcome is yet to emerge — remains a big question. In conclusion, I will again repeat that the review is a remarkable accomplishment for Bangladesh and by Bangladeshis. In the light of the observations made above, the next Review may be a tripartite effort of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, the Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh representing the NGO sector and the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries representing the private sector.