

Eye for Handlooms

The decline of the country's handloom industry makes a pathetic study. The measures taken at different times to stem it proved inadequate because those were piecemeal and largely perfunctory.

In the absence of a comprehensive government policy, the industry is now threatened with a virtual extinction. The traditional skill and the ability to adapt to changing tastes and styles are all there but the weavers could not benefit from the various half-hearted measures taken by the policy-makers.

Even if this is gradually implemented, there is little chance that the weavers would be deriving much benefit from the policy. Clearly, there is no indication how the small weavers will get rid of the bonded loan and labour system under which the lion's share of the profit goes to the middlemen.

Yet the potential is there. The country's internal demand for check cloth amounts to 11 crore metres. The Grameen Bank and others venturing in this area have proved the worth of our weaver community. If an integrated plan is in place to give a backward linkage to our readymade garment industry, now mostly dependent on imported cloth, we surely can visualise a bright future not only for the weavers but also for the garments sector.

Price Vigil

Reflecting concern for holding the price-line during the month of Ramadan, the Commerce Minister on Wednesday held a meeting with chamber body leaders, wholesaler representatives and transport owners.

As an expression of good intent by the business community this is welcome, but the government can hardly rest on such a laurel because: (a) the prices have already overshot the purse of the middle class, let alone that of the commonman; and (b) there is little guarantee that factors that have been pushing the prices upwards can be overcome any time soon.

Even with the 'satisfactory' stocks of rice, pulses, edible oil, pepper, onion, sugar and ginger we cannot rest assured that their prices would not carry an element of penalty for the consumers if *mastari* were to continue.

So, the great need is felt for containing the extortionist behaviour with some strategic planning. We propose that composite vigilance committees be formed at the community level with lawmen, trade leaders and other local influential elements. Political affiliations should be subordinated to the consideration of common good as consumers which all of us are.

Pitha Utsav

Pitha is a magical word, sing-song to the ear, irresistibly eye-catching, and mouth-watering in an overwhelming sense. The names of its endless kinds are steeped in tradition going back to a few thousand years.

Once the season of fruits and that of pithas, basically rice-based, used to draw the city-dwelling families to their village homes and strengthen their bonds with their rural brothers and sisters.

Such a scene could not obviously be reconstructed in toto at the Shishu Academy Pitha Utsav the other day. Yet it was the closest to the authentic one could get in the hum-drum of city-life.

Pithas of some kind or the other are common to the world. From this standpoint too, Shishu Academy has done a good job displaying our own fare.

All failures are usually followed by re-arrangements. The collapse of the recent talks between the government and the opposition is no exception. Allegations and counter-allegations about the reasons for the failure will fill the newspaper pages.

Some people are so frustrated and dismayed by the prospect of confrontation that they opt for the easy way out of blaming both sides. But the actual reason for the failure of the talks may be different. The talks may have failed because one side did not negotiate in good faith.

Why the Talks Failed

S.A.M.S. Kibria, who was a member of the Opposition group which participated in the ill-fated talks with the BNP explains, from the Opposition point of view, as to why negotiations failed. We hope BNP members participating in the talks will also share their views with our readers.

The issue on which no agreement could be reached was whether the president or the prime minister/Chief Adviser of the neutral caretaker government should exercise the executive power of the government.

The solution that seemed to be emerging from the talks during the last few weeks' rather desultory discussions was the following: 1. The president will appoint, on the recommendation of the outgoing prime minister and the former leader of the opposition, a council of ministers/advisers headed by a prime minister/Chief Adviser who will be non-partisan and neutral and who will not seek election to the parliament.

2. Following the agreement, consultations will be urgently held between the government and the opposition on the reorganization of the Election Commission, revision of the electoral rolls and those administrative steps which would be necessary to 'de-politicize' the administration.

3. On the basis of the consensus thus established, a new date for the general election will be fixed by the Election Commission.

The issue on which no agreement could be reached was whether the president or the prime minister/Chief Adviser of the neutral caretaker government should exercise the executive power of the government.

The opposition patiently pointed out that BNP's proposal would change the very structure of the constitution from parliamentary to presidential system. In any case, the president, a long standing member of the BNP, was a BNP nominee who was elected by the BNP members of the parliament.

The issue on which no agreement could be reached was whether the president or the prime minister/Chief Adviser of the neutral caretaker government should exercise the executive power of the government.

The issue on which no agreement could be reached was whether the president or the prime minister/Chief Adviser of the neutral caretaker government should exercise the executive power of the government.

The issue on which no agreement could be reached was whether the president or the prime minister/Chief Adviser of the neutral caretaker government should exercise the executive power of the government.

The issue on which no agreement could be reached was whether the president or the prime minister/Chief Adviser of the neutral caretaker government should exercise the executive power of the government.

The issue on which no agreement could be reached was whether the president or the prime minister/Chief Adviser of the neutral caretaker government should exercise the executive power of the government.

The issue on which no agreement could be reached was whether the president or the prime minister/Chief Adviser of the neutral caretaker government should exercise the executive power of the government.

The issue on which no agreement could be reached was whether the president or the prime minister/Chief Adviser of the neutral caretaker government should exercise the executive power of the government.

tion. However today it is clear as daylight that the government was planning all the while to stage a fake election without the participation of the opposition.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the prime minister's wish to uphold the constitution is utterly hypocritical. She proposed that upon her resignation the president will exercise executive power.

Which the people fought so hard. Yet when it suits the BNP they are ready to break the constitution and when it does not suit them they become its staunchest defenders!

ON THE RECORD

by Shah A M S Kibria

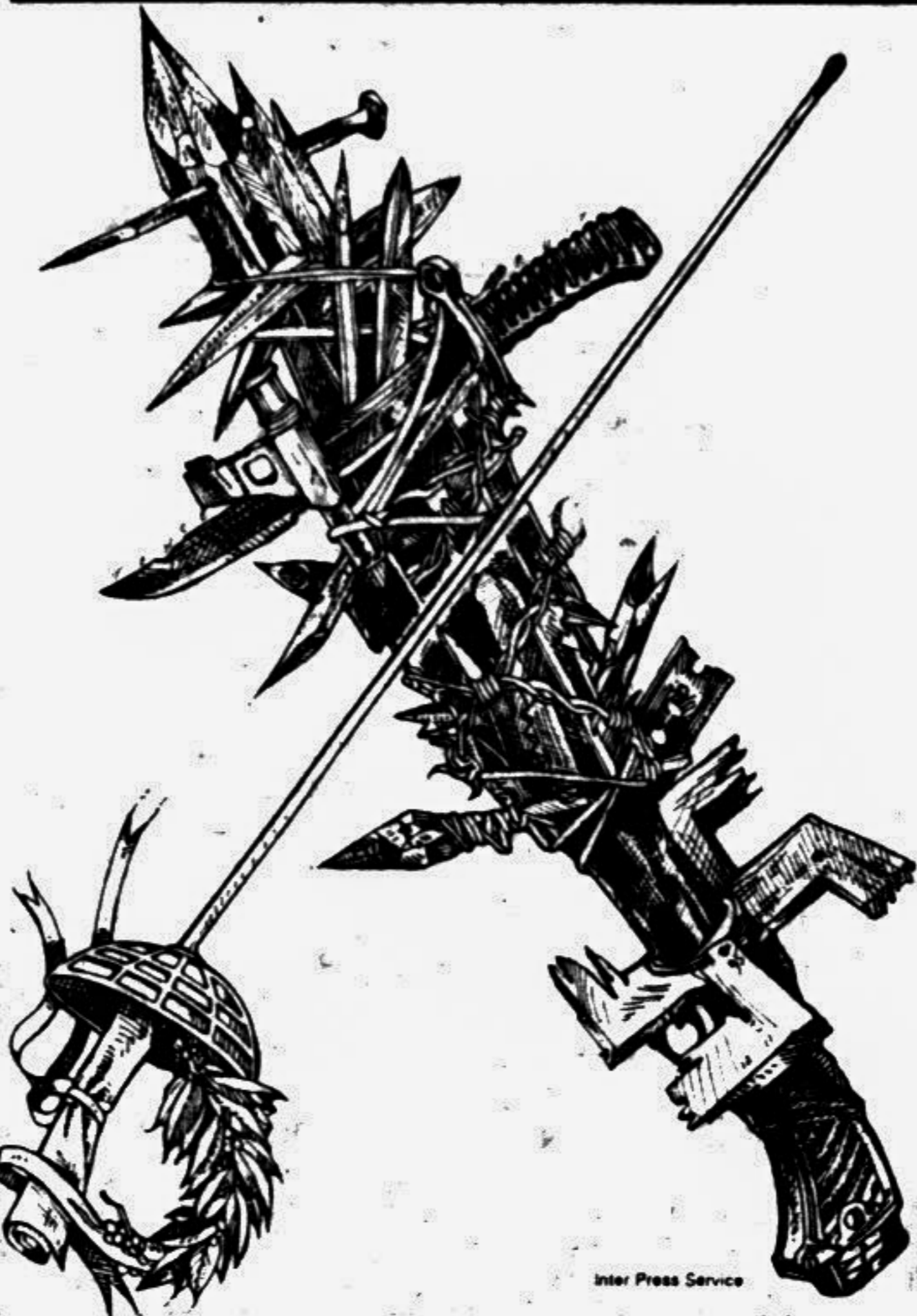


The constitution. I invite the foreign envoys who were witness to these talks to say if the position as stated by me faithfully reflects the status of the negotiations.

exercise by taking a rigid position on the issue of date of the election. By insisting that the elections must be held by 22 February the BNP made it impossible for the opposition parties to take part in it.

Post-Cold War Wars

Fifty years after the end of World War II, Europe is still suffering from armed conflicts. In this exclusive Inter Press Service column, Czech President Vaclav Havel reminds us of history's lessons: Democracies need to be forever vigilant about the rise of demagogues and tribalism.



without any significant opposition on the part of the international community. The last challenge to these policies was lost in 1938, when European democracies failed the test of their commitment to defence and solidarity by signing the Munich Agreement.

How was it possible for an ideology as perverted as National Socialism to come into being in a civilised European country? How was it possible for legislation that made mockery of law to be adopted in Nuremberg, an old European city associated with the historical codification of city law?

One of the lessons to be drawn from WWII is that the international community should not think just mechanically in terms of balance of power among individual nations. It should also look at what is going on inside those countries.

After the war everyone felt sure that nothing like it could be allowed to happen ever again. Nuremberg played host to the trials that introduced the institution of an international war crimes tribunal, intended to serve as a warning to all those who might consider similar practices in the future.

believe that atrocities committed in wartime will go unpunished and therefore provoke wars, ridiculing the international community.

And there are still democratic governments that believe aggressors can be stopped with concessions, with piecemeal manoeuvring in a word, by giving in to evil.

The United Nations too, though undeniably it has often played a positive role in settling international disputes, still has a long way to go to live up to the expectations and objectives of its founders.

As WWII becomes increasingly remote with years, and especially now that communism has collapsed, the vigilance of the democrats seems to have slackened. Again, democracy seems to have been reduced to a mere routine, a mechanism for shaping political will.

Yet if democracy is to remain vital, the values on which it is founded must be constantly renewed. Today again we need politicians who remember the ethical basis of democracy and understand that one cannot rely on routine diplomacy when dealing with militant nationalists.

Communist Victory in Russian Polls: A Sociological Analysis

by Imtiaz Ahmed

THE communist party in Russia made a tremendous comeback by securing highest votes — 22 per cent of the total votes followed by Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party which secured 11 per cent.

But high inflation, increasing unemployment, closure of mills and factories, collapse of law and order, social insecurity and withdrawal of subsidies in agriculture, etc., daunted the expectation of Russian people. And on the eve of Christmas Day, having last expectation to sort out the question of economic emancipation in communism, the Russian people voted spontaneously in favour of the communist party rejecting Boris Yeltsin's so-called reform process.

When communism collapsed in the Soviet Union, 15 states became independent, breaking away from the union. The western world specially the Group of Seven (G-7) countries agreed to aid Russia on some prescribed conditions to rebuild her economy from socialist to capitalistic pattern.

US dollar, frequent corruptions by the Russian bureaucrats, increasing gaps between haves and have-nots, scores of murderers and rapists were acquitted, despite convincing proof of their guilt.

In Washington, the State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns expressed his expectation that the new Duma would be ideologically different from the past one so that the reforms could not be disrupted. The Russian constitution gives the president so much power that the new Duma will hardly be able to impeach the presidency of Boris Yeltsin.



advantage of the democratic reforms. The state prosecutors were not well groomed to treat them. As a result, scores of murderers and rapists were acquitted, despite convincing proof of their guilt.

Marx wrote his Communist Manifesto keeping in mind the tyranny of capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century when the capitalists' inhuman be-

haviour, oppression, repression on wage workers were regular phenomena. The history of mankind in the period of Marx was of exploitation by colonial rulers like the British, French and Spanish.

In the parliament election under proportional system, the communist party got 99 seats followed by the Liberal Democratic Party with 50, Our Home Russia with 14 and the Liberal Yabloko Group with 10.

The political scientists expressed their deep concern when the Russian communist party leader Gennady Zyuganov vowed to scrap the 1991 Belovezhskaya agreement that dismantled the Soviet Union and paved the way for 15 independent states to be born.

haviour, oppression, repression on wage workers were regular phenomena. The history of mankind in the period of Marx was of exploitation by colonial rulers like the British, French and Spanish.

The world in the period of Marx and that during the cold war period are obviously different. The model which Marx presented to the mankind keeping in mind the economic emancipation in that period would obviously need some changes in the modern world.

Soviet Union. The Politbureau members of communist party, bureaucrats and their relatives in the administration of communist countries used the state apparatus to cater to their undue advantage depriving the multitude of millions. The decline in the consumer goods production in the communist countries did not earn people's confidence while, in the western countries, better production catered to the need of their people.

The victory of Russian communist party in December election could hardly be described as the victory of communism over capitalism. High inflation, close-down of factories, increasing unemployment, corrupt bureaucracy, loss of social security, alarming increase in crime rate are the main causes for the failure of the ruling parties.

It is not yet time to say that communists are back in Russia. People will have to wait till June presidential election. However, it is really a hard time for the communist now to decide whether they would take decision for radical or reformed Marxism and time has come for them to take the right step.

Yeltsin tries on the China hat