### The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Sunday, January 21, 1995

### 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. The cottage industry became less competitive - and therefore less viable - down the road, for reasons both internal and extraneous. The internal problems concern the high prices of yarn and raw materials and above all marketing hindrances. The extraneous ones relate to the supply of cheaper variety of clothes smuggled into the country.

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 halfhearted measures taken by the policy-makers. The recent textile policy has sought to address a number of problems facing the weavers. Yet they are not going to be enough. Besides, the implementation of the policy hangs fire.

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. Nor is there any guarantee that all the weavers will be able to avail of the government loans to switch over to power handlooms. And most

importantly, there is no sign that the market-

ing of their products will be any easier. 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. If we do not take this step urgently, we will be losing our market of readymade garments abroad. If the garment factories are fed with indigenously produced materials, the benefit will indeed be manifold.

#### Price Vigil

Reflecting concern for holding the priceline during the month of Ramadan, the Commerce Minister on Wednesday held a meeting with chamber body leaders, wholesaler representatives and transport owners. The presence of the President of Consumers' Association of Bangladesh, Borhan Ahmed, added a buyers' angle to the proceedings. The participants reportedly gave an assurance to the minister that they would keep the prices of essentials within the commonman's reach.

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. In fact, a greater political unrest looms large foreshadowing a fresh dislocation on the supply side. There is an increasing fright that in a deteriorating law and order situation, the illegal toll collection could exacerbate to raise prices at the consumers' level.

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 mastani were to con-

tinue. 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

Items with which the rojdars will break their fast have already registered a price hike. At no time is the traders' social commitment so much on test than during the month of Ramadan. We are hoping to see a healthy coordination between wholesalers and retailers on the one hand and between the chamber bodies and the government on the other in the holy month.

#### 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. These are also a phonetical wizardry in the art of the use of Bangla language, based on imageries, shapes of things, processes of preparation and salivation to the palate.

Once the season of fruits and that of pithas, basically rice-based, used to draw the citydwelling families to their village homes and strengthen their bonds with their rural brothers and sisters. Pithas in particular went well in the company of grannies in the mystique of pre-dawn darkness followed by sunrise and inter-lacing dew-drops on the surtace.

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. The academy deserves our kudos for presenting, courtesy of the children, a few thousand pithas in one hundred genres that vivified the best of our indigenous food culture. The wayside pithawallas better upgrade their preparations.

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

ing our own fare.

# 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.

ing for a settlement. Without going into the history of the past negotiations, let us take a look at the status of the talks at the point when the government decided to go ahead with its plan for a oneparty election.

LL failures are usu-

ally followed by re-

criminations. The

collapse of the recent talks

between the government and

the opposition is no excep-

tion. Aflegations and counter-

allegations about the reasons

for the failure will fill the

newspaper pages. One will

not be surprised if the prime

minister decides to "address"

the nation on the television

and the radio to present her

side of the case. After all, her

exclusive control over these

powerful media give her an

unique advantage over her

political opponents. We have

all seen how for full five years

she had used these media as

the vehicle of her personal

and party propaganda. But

propaganda aside, truth has a

force of its own. Somehow

truth manages to come out of

the mists of half-truths and

subterfuges. What was then

trated 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 fail-

ure of the talks may be dif-

ferent. The talks may have

failed because one side did

not negotiate in good faith.

One side may not have

wanted a settlement which

would bring all the political

parties into the electoral

process. The talks were used

by this side merely for tacti-

cal reasons. I maintain that

in the present case the gov-

ernment side never negoti-

ated in good faith. They

merely wanted to deceive the

people into believing that

they were trying hard for a

negotiated settlement. In

particular, the government

wanted to impress the donor

community that it was a great

champion of democracy and

that it was seriously negotiat-

War wars into tribal wars in

which age-old ethnic rivalries

are revived and ignited into

violence. In these regions it

is our duty, and also in our

own interest, to support

those forces that are

committed to the values of

civil society and human

Nuremberg became the stage

for one of the key moments

of the greatest horror and ig-

nominy of this century. The

Reichstag, by then no more

than a contemptible carica-

ture of the previous parlia-

ment of the German people,

adopted the infamous legisla-

tion reducing one group of

people to the status of infe-

rior beings, segregating them

both politically and racially

from the rest German soci-

ety. It was these publicly de-

clared guidelines that even-

tually led to the largest mass

fortunately, remained deaf

and blind to this reality, lim-

iting themselves by and large

to a mere formal criticism of

these so-called laws. As a re-

sult of the democratic pow-

ers' cautiousness and reluc-

tance to intervene in a force-

ful way, the policy of ap-

peasement prevailed. The

criminals who proclaimed

the Nuremberg Laws were

strengthened in their belief

that they were free to im-

plement them with impunity.

fected also the territories

that were joined to or an-

nexed by the Nazi Reich,

The Nuremberg Laws in-

Western democracies, un-

murder in history.

Precisely 60 years ago

rights.

RAGUE: Power-hun-

gry men have made

Europe's post-Cold

Some people are so frus-

the truth?

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. Once agreement was reached on the above point, the prime minister and her cabinet would resign and clear the deck for the president to take action along the lines of the agree-

ment. 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. While the government wanted those powers for the president, the oppositions wanted that the prime minister/chief adviser should exercise executive powers of the government as envisaged in article 55 (2) of

sition was offered to be considered by the opposition. It was certainly not beyond human ingenuity to devise a formula to solve the problem. The dignity of the high office of the president could have been maintained without altering the neutral and nonpartisan character of the council of ministers/advisers It is a matter of profound disappointment that at the last moment the BNP negotiators effectively nullified the entire

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.

The opposition patiently pointed out that BNP's proposal would change the very structure of the constitution from parliamentary to the 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. How could one regard him as non-partisan? But the BNP was inflexible even when a middle po-

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. Indeed, this was the surest way to exclude the opposition parties from the election because they knew pretty well that there was no way in which these parties could join the election if the date was not shifted to March

What is surprising is that the BNP negotiators knew, while the talks were going on, that the date would have

or early April.

to be shifted to late March or early April in order to give at least the minimum time needed for the opposition parties to geas up their nomination procedures. In any case, general election in the month of Ramadan was considered inconveninent and unpopular. So why the sudden stiffening of the position on the election date? An agreement on the form of the caretaker government would be totally useless if the election date in February was maintained. In fact, the shifting of the date was assumed to be an integral part of the agreement on the form of the government during the election period.

In retrospect, it is clear

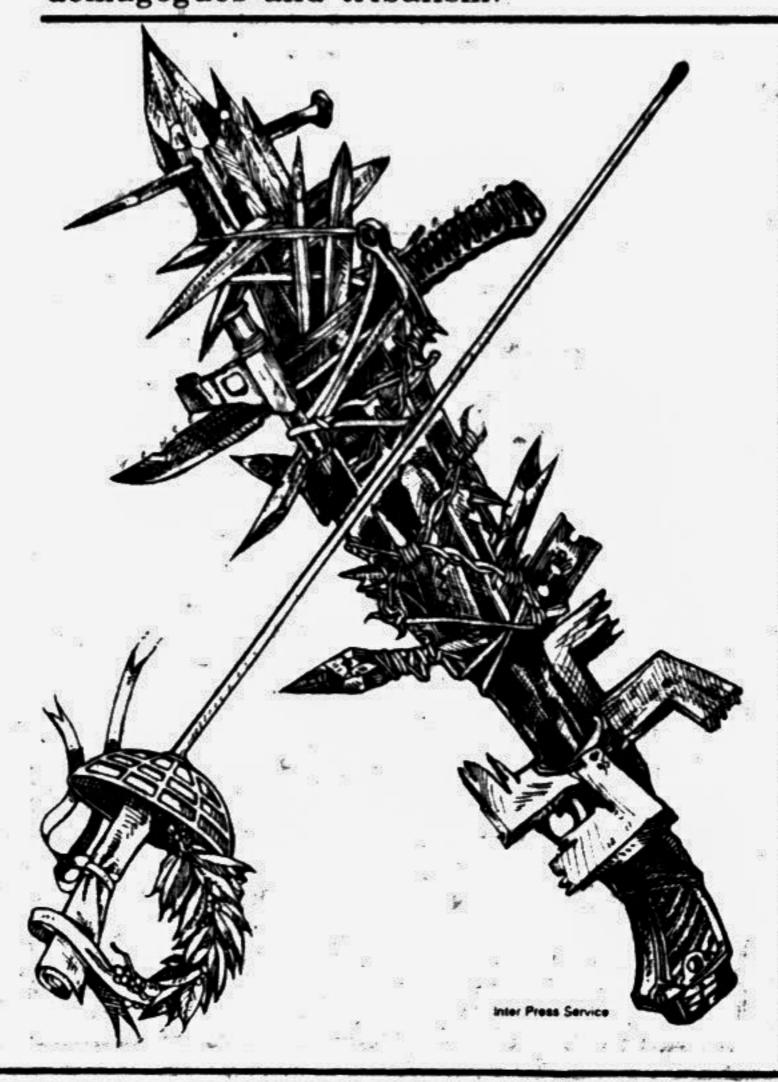
that the BNP government was never serious about a settlement which would bring the opposition parties into the election. We often wondered why they never engaged in sustained or serious talks. Now we know the reason. Whenever the opposition announced a programme, the government would make some move to deflect public attention from the opposition's movement. Now one can see why the prime minister stubbornly refused to enter into talks with the opposition on the basis of an agreed agenda. All she wanted was a public relations exercise to show the people and the foreign envoys that the government was trying its best for an amicable solu-

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. When a settlement seemed imminent they shifted their ground and took shelter under the plea of the constitutional time limit to reject the shifting of the date. The whole nation would have welcomed the agreement even if the letter of the constitution was violated because they would have wanted the spirit of democracy to be kept alive. 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. The nation should ash her: is there such a provision in constitution? Such an arrangement is not only unconstitutional, it goes against the spirit of the parliamentary democracy for 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! The opposition negotiated in good faith in the belief that a national consensus to solve the crisis and arrange a genuinely free and fair election under a neutral. non-partisan government would have received the support and blessing not only from the whole nation but also from the nation's legal community. Could the highest court of justice of the country ignore a national consensus to resolve a political crisis which is threatening to thrust the nation towards confrontation and con-

## 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 Agree-

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? And how was it possible for the democratic powers to just stand by and watch, thereby allowing this wrongdoing to spread?

seems that many politicians regarded democracy as nothing but a mechanism for generating political will while the awareness of its moral foundations was lost. It was not until the outbreak of World War II that democrats realised it does not pay to tolerate the intolerable and to use standard diplomatic methods when dealing with a regime that violates every rule on which European civilisation has been built. The price that had to be paid for their slowness in understanding this was high indeed.

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. The Munich Agreement was a direct consequence of the mistaken belief that for the sake of maintaining a balance of power, concessions should be made even to a regime that promulgated the Nuremberg Laws. The horrors of the Holocaust and the suffering of the war were the fruits of that.

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.

After the war everyone

Another outcome of WWII was the creation of the United Nations, whose mission has been to prevent such horrors from being repeated. But it appears as if hu-

mankind will never learn. There are still those who seek to divide people according to their ethnic affiliations and revive the spirit of tribal

There are still those who

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. Aggressors cannot be stopped with Chamberlainstyle policies.

For the same reason we also need citizens who are able to recognise evil at its inception and stand up to it despite the personal risks and then voice their position clearly, in the most resolute terms, to their political representatives.

### Communist Victory in Russian Polls: A Sociological Analysis

by Imtiaz Ahmed

mendous comeback by securing highest votes — 22 per cent of the total votes followed by Zhirinovosky's Liberal Democratic Party which secured 11 per cent. The people of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union voiced their opinion against communism in the late eighties and the freshest of western aid made the way for the Russian President Boris Yeltsin to go ahead with economic' reform prescribed by the western countries merged with capitalism in the expectation of higher economic growth, better living standard as in the

capitalistic

HE communist party

in Russia made a tre-

countries. 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 re-

western

form 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 socialistic to capitalistic pattern. Almost 70 years later Russia and the breakaway republics started to rebuild their economy in the way prescribed by World Bank, International Monetary Fund, International Development Agency etc. But in five years time, devaluation of fouble by many times against

US dollar, frequent corruptions by the Russian bureaucrats, increasing gaps between haves and have-nots, collapse of law and order forced the Russian people to give a second thought to Boris Yeltsin's reform pro-

Election analysts say that the hardliner communists achieved success in the election because Russian people, specially the elderly, voted spontaneously in favour of the communist party in expectation of more social security, restoration of law and order, more job opportunity, better economic growth, reintroduction of old pension system for retired people, and recovery of the image of the former super-power. The political scientists mentioned two main reasons for this: liberalisation brought by the collapse of communism and the lack of money to pay foradequate law enforcement.

Russian criminals took full

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.

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. But Boris Yeltsin will be in deep trouble if he goes on to carry the reform process along with inflation, increasing unemployment, dispute and excessive spending in Chechnya. In that situation the Russian people would obviously reject Yeltsin in the next

idential candidates.



Yeltsin tries on the China hat

presidential election. However, President Boris Yeltsin vowed to go ahead with reform process in spite of the fragile economy of the coun-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 communist party will have 157 seats out of 450 seats in the state Duma followed by Zhirinovsky's 51 seats. In the Russian system, to override presidential veto. two-thirds of seats are required. The communist party with 151 seats and Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic with 51 seats have together the supremacy of 208 seats, but political analysts did not see any light of alliance between the two parties because both are probable pres-

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. The strategy taken by the Russian Communist party would obviously create tension in the European Union - for it seems to yield the scope of cold war between Russia and the breakaway republics.

Marx wrote his Communist Manifesto keeping in mind the tyranny of capitalism in the eighteenth and the 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. The history of British colonial rule of almost 200 years is well known to the people of the sub-continent. Marx died in 1883 and the history of mankind has veered towards a new dimension of shaping and reshaping the human life with "comfort" of consumerism which the communist regime did not or could not cater to the need of the common people as the capitalist system 'provided'

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. The Marxist, irrespective of radical or reformist, should sort out the solution by inventing new model. Because, in the worldwide economic recession of the thirties the western countries changed their economic policy to cater to the need of the people. So the model which was given more than 100 years ago could hardly cater to the need of the people of eastern Europe after a century.

The economists and political scientists should sort out a new theory in Russia to keep the communist rule in that region going, if they want. In the name of communism, a corrupt bureaucracy developed in the eastern Europe and the former

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 state-owned heavy industry in: the former Soviet Union did achieve a tremendous success in nuclear arms industry. and the country earned major foreign currency by exporting arms but it could not do well in consumer goods sector thus depriving the people (consumers). In the history of communism, the politbureau members of the communist parties and the bureaucrats are alleged to have misused the Marxist theory and communism.

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 par-

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 commuhists now to decide whether they would take decision for radical or reformed Marxism and time has come for them to take the right step. Perhaps, the chance to prove that human emancipation lies in communism, not in capitalism, is waiting for the communists.