

Expenditure Control

The ten per cent cut, demanded by the finance ministry in the ancillary spendings of the government, will not be enough to balance the revenue budget in view of the crunch it faces.

Now let's have a national idea of the deficit stored up by the long drawn-out political unrest. When the rug over the wound will have been pulled away following a political settlement, and the measurement made of it, we shall doubtlessly be shocked by it.

Revenue collection has been going down under all heads — taxes, departmental receipts, customs duties, VAT and export earnings. Internal resource-mobilisation as a back-up for development work has received quite a setback.

Unless the increased government borrowing from the banking system is curbed as a matter of policy now, financial discipline would be hard to enforce down the line.

The finance ministry can only issue directives on expenditure control; it is for the other ministries to abide by these with a sense of urgency. Since the latest instructions are the product of a desperate situation, there is no way these can be treated lightly with any customary indifference by the government offices.

The revenue-earning departments are required to redouble their efforts, after the political stand-off ends, to brighten the collection picture.

Rebuilding the Image

Now that there is a hope for an amicable solution to the country's long-running and terribly sapping political crisis, it is the need of the hour to recast and, where necessary, reemphasise our priority areas.

The officials at the foreign ministry should get a plan of action ready for the caretaker government that will hopefully be inducted soon to supervise the country's affairs till a new elected government takes over after a representative election is held in three to four months' time.

The job of attracting foreign investors may not be easy for a caretaker government. But leaving it unattended till the elected government is in place, will make it even harder for the latter.

Let's, therefore, put our heads together to launch a comprehensive and concerted image-building campaign abroad.

To the Editor...

The impending starvation

Sir, Much water has since flown on the current political impasse which has indeed ruined the country's economy to a point of no return, and the collapse is now a matter of time.

Months ago. For a civilized society it would have been enough to fall in a limbo. Of course such incidents do not torment us: we are valiant people, we take it to be cowardice to be taken aback by this.

And all these go in the name of 'peaceful, democratic and spontaneous display of anger'. One group calls them arsonists while the other group gives them a hero's welcome, and if possible and thought advantageous, the body of the dead is raised high on the shoulders with a 'stigma' or 'insignia' of martyrdom.

How Long this Descent into Dark Valley?

by Md Asadullah Khan

THE effect of the non-cooperation that has almost taken the shape of hartal since 25th February has been very much unsettling. But the administration appears to be least perturbed by the orgy of clashes and destruction that have erupted in all parts of the country.

In the absence of any aid flow in the country, the economic situation will be adversely affected triggering unemployment and unrest. The President of the Republic and the Prime Minister in whom people looked for guidance and direction, failed the nation miserably.

Aggravated by fertilizer crisis. Boro cultivation in the country has been seriously affected and the expected yield of crops will not be achieved. These two factors will compound the crisis in the days to come.

Havala's Fallout on Elections

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

AFTER serving as British High Commissioner to India for six years, Nicholas Fenn said at a farewell lunch that he would give his right arm to know who would win at the polls.

There is a sharp decline in the stock of most political parties. Havala has rocked them all. The two main parties, the ruling Congress and the BJP in the opposition, have been mauled the most.

The BJP looked like winning nearly 150 seats in the Lok Sabha. But as of today, it will be hard put to retain its present strength of 122. The party's mask of cleanliness has come off to the disillusionment of the middle class.

On the other side, Congress continues to lose in prestige. True, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao has brought the BJP many notches down. But neither he nor his party has gained much.

No doubt, the morale of Congress cadres is higher than before. But they are conscious that their president, Rao, has the feet of clay. The spate of resignations by Congress ministers has not given the party

doldrums. The country has lost a substantial international market in the garments sector, leather goods and shrimps. The loss in the frozen food export, it is learnt, is likely to be 2000 crore Taka.

The fact is, many people now are not supporting the ruling party move. It is not that they liked the other party and were beating hatred and grudge against BNP from the beginning.

Despite the fact that the national dailies, the intelligentsia and the country's various professional groups have issued a clarion call to the political parties for reconciliation.

cancelling the 15th February polls and its result and an immediate arrangement of a free and fair polls by a neutral caretaker government.

The administration at this crucial hour of the nation's history cannot go away from facts, rather it has to address the grievances of the fuming public throughout the country. Ironically true, what is still lacking is the political will to resolve the crisis.

The happenings over the last two years and especially after the February election never bode well for a successful democratic transition.

reason has not ruled the politics of the country. Instead of working for a clear common good, the ruling party tore apart the tenuous link that was looming up.

The administration at this crucial hour of the nation's history cannot go away from facts, rather it has to address the grievances of the fuming public throughout the country.

The happenings over the last two years and especially after the February election never bode well for a successful democratic transition.

of transport movement and food shortage. Demoralised by the country's dim prospects for economic growth, Bangladeshis are voting with their feet in a nation of 120 million.

True, administration's experiment with democracy during the last five years has bred disenchantment for the people with the very institution which held out so much promise at the beginning of the term.

True, the previous governments that ruled this country

did not satisfy the people but what people see is that even democracy now seems to be faltering. The situation in the country typifies a state where political differences have led to bloody clashes and catastrophe.

The county's agony is only increasing. Death toll on different accounts soars with each passing day. But shortage of food stuff, and soaring prices are only symptoms of a deeper crisis.

OPINION

Five Points for Consideration by the Opposition

Viquar I Choudhury

In my view the Opposition parties now should reconsider their strategy towards the proposed amendment of the Constitution by the BNP government for the following reasons:

1. The objective of the political movement led by the Opposition parties starting with boycott and eventual quitting of the Parliament (which I think was misconceived) was for introduction of an amendment in the Constitution to provide for a neutral caretaker government during the period of elections of the Parliament.

2. Although there is a widely-held belief that the February election was heavily rigged and flawed, in fact no legal action was ever instituted to annul the election nor any judicial pronouncement was made by any competent court of law in this regard.

3. The economic life of the country is being ruined as a result of the present political crisis. The industrial and commercial life is almost at the point of halt.

4. A section of the country may realise that BNP could have avoided the present situation if they had agreed to the concept of the neutral caretaker government two years back.

5. Absence of any effective governance resulting in destruction of the fabrics of the society, will have a long-term effect.

opinion is so strong against Congress chief minister Hiteswar Salkia that the AGP looks like sweeping the state. Muslims, who were on the side of Congress in the last election, have also decided to support the AGP.

Some differences and some irritants will remain even after the understanding the various groups are trying to hammer out. What will string them together is the anti-Congress and the anti-BJP sentiment.

This is the time for the NGOs to play some role because they may be able to inject some values into the system that is devoid of them.

Dhaka Day by Day Learning to Live with Non-cooperation

by Shamsad Mortuza

How many times we will have to liberate ourselves? How many wars we will have to fight for freedom?

We have fought the British to gain India, fought with ourselves to gain Pakistan, fought with the West Pakistanis to gain Bangladesh.

This reaction to the present political crises came from the least expected corner of our society.

How long can one withstand wars? Salim lost his uncle and cousin in 1971. "My cousin was thrown into the boiler of a jute mill in Khulna. We never saw the body of our uncle. I was young then.

He didn't indulge in filthy exchange of words, as is the practice among these men. Rather, he kept on saying: "History will not get lost. History will interpret the real cause and effect of our liberation war."

Salim continued to surprise me with his sense and sensibility. It has become a habit of mine to converse with what we call common people. I try to feel their pulse and share their views. But Salim was exceptional.

What do you think the people will tell them? Do they really have the guts to tell? Salim's voice rose a little.

My freedom fighter cousin shouted at a Pakistani camp after hearing the news of freedom, saying, "This is not independence. Nine months cannot give independence of a nation."



pregnant!

The misery of the Palestinians outweigh any misery humanity has ever witnessed, and even now they are the targets of state sponsored terrorism hit-list.

But what an anachronism! Bombing a bus in Bangladesh is heroic while in other parts of the world it is terrorism — a heinous act of villainy.

Mohamed Abdul Mutalib 74 Dharamondi R/A, Rd No-14, Dhaka

Juggleries and laymen

Sir, We have seen fierce exchange of words among the Chamber leaders in the Federation meeting and read juggleries of words in the press from the legal experts and constitutional stalwarts on the overall crisis faced by the nation, without sign of immedi-

ate resolution of the suffering of the commonmen and relief to the devastated commerce and industry of the country.

As I now observe, some leaders (both in trade and politics) are simply emotional and partisan while experts are divided in their interpretation of the Constitution, though the Constitution is very clear according to (some of) them.

Under the circumstances, I do not know how long this stalemate can be allowed to continue and the commonmen made to suffer from the juggleries of the partisan politicians and futile exercise of the legal experts — and the leaders would be honest and sincere to solve the crisis by sacrificing their trivial vanity or interest for the greater interest of the whole nation.

A F Rahman Dhaka