# The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Friday, May 10, 1996

### **Growth Outlook**

Our GDP growth at 4.4 per cent in fiscal 1994-95 as disclosed in the Bangladesh Bank Annual Report for that year looks worryingly modest. The poverty alleviation strategy had called for a higher growth rate of 6 per cent and it so happens that other South Asian countries have averaged that growth rate turning the world's attention to themselves for their investment-worthiness.

Last year's 4.4 per cent growth of GDP was a slender improvement up on the 4.2 per cent recorded in 1993-94. And before us we have an economic outlook report based on the politically troubled performance from July 1995 till date which does not bode too well for the growth rate in fiscal 1995-96. So, here we are caught in a stagnancy cycle.

The broad indicators of growth came under strain during 1994-95. Agricultural production, the mainstay of GDP growth, declined by 1 per cent bringing in its wake an inflationary pressure. too. Exports rose but only to be offset by imports of food grains. And, the balance of payment deficit reached a whopping 2361 million US dollars from 704 million dollars in 1993-94.

The only redeeming features were a higher bank-supported domestic investment in the industrial sector, and, an increased foreign currency retention by exporters. Domestic savings and rate of investment as percentages of GDP hardly increased.

The biggest problem before the newly-elected government would be an inflationary pressure mounting in the wake of election-related expenditure. Its burden could be lightened if the caretaker government, the Election Commission and the political parties act cohesively to contain the electoral expenses. Meanwhile, there ought to be a proper supply-demand management to curb the inflationary pressure.

The Bangladesh Bank Annual Report, 1994-95, is nearly one year too late in terms of topicality. Of course, as a record-keeping document it has its own value, but that is nothing to-compare with the utility it would have had on seeing the light of the day in due time. We urge the central bank to come out with timely annual reports in the future and whet the appetite for authentic and fresh information on the state of the national economy.

### EC's Right Move

The Election Commission has taken a practical step to hold free and fair elections by constituting electoral enquiry committees at the district level. These will be charged with the responsibility to investigate pre-polls irregularities and other deviations on the part of individual candidates for the next month's election or political partiesor both. The most significant thing is the empowerment of the electoral committees, comprising judicial officials, to independently probe any violation of election rules.

The committees will act either on receipt of complaints from aggrieved parties or on their own by taking cognizance of an offence. These are likely to be more responsive to a situation than the older-version election tribunals. This shows that the EC means business. The very fact of giving the electoral enquiry committees the power to move independently against violators of election rules practically goes to reinforce other regulatory efforts for making the election free and fair. We now hope these enquiry bodies will deliver what is expected of them.

There is no doubt these enquiry committees have all the potential to play a key role in keeping the election process free of all the undesirable influences, including those of money power and muscle power. Now what is needed is to define the committees' role in detail and also to develop an efficient system or means for them to work. At the same time the existence of the committees will have to be given extensive publicity to enable the public to make good use of them whenever the situation so demands. Responsive committees. and a cooperative public can work wonders in enforcing the election rules and regulations.

#### Confidence in Police

The death of a conch artisan in police firing at Shankharibazar has been shrouded in mystery. Controversies over the police action vis-a-vis the attack on the police team by people at the bazar are of no help to get a clear picture of what exactly happened there. However, there is a serious allegation against the police involved in the incident: that they had gone there to extort money. The police contended that they chased muggers which drew the wrath of the people.

Whatever it is, at a time when the police are engaged in a country-wide arms recovery drive, an action like that could tarnish their image somewhat. The police should avoid getting any extortionist image. So far as the present case is concerned, no one has the right to draw a conclusion about who is to blame. Since there is an allegation against the police, an inquiry body should be constituted to set the confusion at rest.

What is of utmost importance is the restoration of public confidence in the police. If the police work neutrally and still have to share the blame for some past misdeeds of their colleagues, that cannot help police-public relations. The public have a right to live in peace without being harassed or disturbed and so do the police deserve cooperation from the citizens in the discharge of their rightful duties. Democratic norms demand that their respective roles are mutually seen the right perspective.

## Will the Next Parliament be a Millionaires Club?

by Nural Kabir

HE major power contenders - Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Awami League - seem to be desperate to win the forthcoming general elections. This has been evident from the last extended meetings of the parties' central bodies held in the capital last month. The chiefs of the parties, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina respectively, had clearly told their audiences that the matter of victory in the ensuing polls was a life and death question for their organ-

Such attitude of the major - try parties would really make it difficult for the Election Commission (EC) to hold the polls in a peaceful atmosphere. When major contenders consider the results of an election to be "a life and death question" for them, one has the reason to apprehend that the activists of the parties might make efforts to rig the polls in favour of their respective candidates

The hunger for power of the parties has meanwhile reached such a height that both the organisations have, in the hope of winning certain ties, the entire political system seats, recruited a significant number of moneyed individuals being isolated from people and - who had no connections. with the parties concerned the other day and many of whom do not enjoy reputation for lawful earnings - reportedly to award nomination in the polls.

With a conviction that moneyed outsiders have brighter prospects in the polls than the middle class insiders, the parties have resorted to invite even highly controversial personalities into their respective organisational folds. They have also welcomed some political personalities who had even a few months ago served the rival camps.

In the process, the League, which still loves to boast for leading the nation's War of Liberation in 1971, has received in the party people like Justice Nurul Islam and Shamsul Huda who had effectively collaborated with the occupation forces of Pakistan in 1971. On the other hand, the BNP. which these days conveniently criticises the Jamaat for its anti-liberation role, has recently welcomed a known collaborator Abdul Alim Chowd-

The parties have received some freedom fighters too. But it is a bit surprising to see that a Liberation War hero like Major (Retd) Rafigul Islam is joining the AL on the same day the notorious Justice Nurul Islam has joined the party. Same is the case with Obaidur Rahman, a valiant freedom fighter. and collaborator Abdul Alim Chowdhury. They have staged their comeback to the BNP on

the same day. For us, it is, however, not less interesting to observe that ideology cannot stand on the way of many conflicting per- stands a chance to turn into sonalities when their ultimate mere club of a few nouveau goal is the same : ticket for a

Jatiya Sangsad seat. now ready to award nomina-

tion to the outsiders who have

in the past neither shown in terest for any ideology, nor did they make any sacrifice for the parties concerned, the already shattered political system of the country is bound to receive another blow.

When dedication of the original activists is not re warded by the parties, a sense of demoralisation as well as kind of deprivation is bound to loom large on the people who have actually been nursing the political organisation as at the grassroots over the years. This will eventually weaken the political process across the coun-

Besides, the local level politicians who have rightfu claims on the party nomina tions would feel encouraged to indulge solely in the money making process, instead o winning the hearts of the elec torate by safeguarding people's interests. Because, many of them have meanwhile realised that it is rather money, not dedication towards party and people, that can bring them nominations for JS seats.

With the political aspirations of the moneyed outsiders entertained by the major par is now exposed to a danger of their problems. And it is not impossible that the local level leaders would develop a ten dency to use the party appara tus as an effective means of making money. Concepts like 'ideology' 'principle' would gradually become unfamiliar is sues in politics.

The situation would be worse if the moneyed nomi nees, especially who have no political past, bag the seats they are to contest for in the polls. Such candidates, mostly living in the big towns, usually have little connection with their electorate of the rura constituencies. So they would try to win the voters by money - which would further corrupt the election process. Such symptom is already there although nobody knows whether the EC is planning to implement the electoral law that limits the election ex penses of a candidate within Taka three lakhs only.

The corrupting influences would not even end with the passage of the outsiders in the polls. Once elected to Parlia ment, the first thing they are likely to do is to make attempt to recoup their money spent with profit by manipulating, if not the Parliament itself, their membership in the House Cost-benefit analysis is the prime concern for a business-

On top of all, such members would not be able, even if they are willing, to represent the interest of their electorate: because they are believably not familiar with the problems their poor constituency-people

confront every day. Thus, the Jatiya Sangsad riche, instead of being a na tional platform to make laws But with the major parties and address issues with a view to changing the lot of the mil-

### The Indian Elections for a Majority INALLY, the third and

last phase of the Indian parliamentary elections has taken place on Tuesday last and all eyes are now cast on the outcome of the polls. Full results are expected to be clear within five days of the conclusion of the elections. Since the polling in the largest democracy in the world has ended amidst uncertainty of its outcome, capitals of most important countries will remain agog with speculations on the results till the clear picture is

The Indian elections have always been a matter of immense interest all over because of the vastness of the country and the nature of governance. The functioning of democracy under the federal setup involving nearly 900 million people warrants interest for obvious reasons. But the elections in 1996 assume special curiosity because of the sequence of the event and the uncertainty that hangs over the polls outcome. Not that Indian election results were not uncertain before in the nearly half a century-old history of the independent country. In fact, twice the results had reby Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

as he was killed in a stunt plane crash while his mother was grooming him as heir-apparent after she bounced back to South Block in the 1977 elections. Rajiv Gandhi, the suave and accomplished airlines pilot, had to be drafted into politics to maintain the Nehru family links with the Congress and was killed in the electioneering while he was widely expected to return to power. Rajiv's death catapulted former foreign and human resources minister PV Narasimha Rao into the centrestage of the Congress party, who eventually became the prime minister and now presides over the difficult time to retain power through the polls this

year. Had Rajiv Gandhi not been assassinated. Mr Rao possibly would not have descended in the Indian political scene in the manner he did as he was almost retiring from active political life due to a failing health and was planning to shift to his native southern

The general impression is that the Hindu revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is making a desperate bid to capture power in New Delhi this time as this party is favoured to gain maximum seats in a widely speculated "hung parliament"

The charismatic BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the former external affairs minister in the Janata Party government, is being projected by the party as the future prime minister of the country. 'Listen to A. B. Vajpayee - the heartbeat of India" read posters in New Delhi during elections an indication of personal attractions that is being projected about him by his party. BJP president LK Advani, also a former information minister in the Janata Party government, is not seeking election this time after being fainted in the much-talked about "Hawala case" along with several other well-known Indian politicians. However, he campaigned actively for the party.

and is already engaged in exercises towards that direction. The BJP, on the other hand, has not lagged behind in forging such alliances like - with the Haryana Vikash party of former defence minister Bansi Lal. In fact, a recent remark by Mr Vajpayee that a section of Congress may extend help in forming government by the BJP after the final polls results are announced brought sharp reactions from the Congress. This is a kind of day-dream the Congressmen in no way will come to play such a role" retorted Rao's close aide and external affairs minister Pranab Mukheriee.

The scenario, as such, is complex and the result will have big impact on both the main parties vying for power. Mr Rao is under pressure from some party leaders about his leadership and the last one to fire the salvo was Mr Karunakaran from Kerala, the union minister, who said the Congress would ask for "one man-one post" after elections - meaning Mr Rao cannot hold both prime ministership and post of party chief after the polls. Most Congress leaders decried this and rallied behind

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mained shrouded in a pattern when no forecast could be made and we saw non-Congress party coming to power. Even in the last polls, the scenario was somewhat unclear and the Congress swept to power riding a crest of sympathy caused by the assassination of its leader Rajiv Gandhi by a woman suicide bomber in Tamil Nadu during the electioneering. The Congress, however, fell short of absolute majority and formed the government as the single largest party with the support of some smaller parties and individuals.

This time, the Congress is fighting an electoral battle for the first time without the charismatic figures of the Nehru family. Late Indian prime minister Jawerharlal Nehru, who was in the helm for nearly seventeen years since the independence, his illustrious daughter Indira Gandhi, who had the credit to stage a comeback to power after losing the 1977 polls, her two sons Rajiv and Sanjay Gandhi - all were seen as vote catchers for the Congress even though party's debacles at times also owed to them. Sanjay never enjoyed state power

Andhra Pradesh state. But the death of undisputed leader Ra-Congress leadership and Mr. Rao, emerged as the least controversial to lead the Congress. He began as as weak political leader since Mr Rao was more known in the Indian government as an intellectual and scholarly person. I had the occasion to interview Mr Rao twice when he was foreign minister under the Indira Gandhi government in the early eighties and everytime he left a soothing intellectual impact on me. But gradually Mr Rao demonstrated the knack of weathering storm of intraparty politics as well as innerparty intricacies and is still firm in the saddle despite parting of the ways by such party stalwarts like Mr Arjun Singh, who was perceived as the number two after Mr Rao and Mr Narain Dutt Tiwari, the political heavyweight from the important Uttar Pradesh state.

The question before the people in India as well as elsewhere is: whether the Congress will get the absolute majority and retain power or the party secures at least single majority and gets the chance of forming the gov-

Who will be the prime minister of India this time - Mr Vajpayee or Mr Rao will continue, or a third front comprising the national front and the centrist Janata Dal will emerge in the centrestage after the elections and find persons like West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu — the communist stalwart - or the Bihar chief minister Janata Dal president Lalpo Prasad Yadav to lead India from New Delhi in the event two likely contenders for power- the BJP and the Congress - fail? These questions are hounding the minds of people all over since the impact of the result has a bearing not only on the major countries but also evidently on the neighbouring nations like

Bangladesh. Both Congress and BJP rejected the prognosis of a "hung parliament" and asserted that they will be able to form government by own strength. Only the National Front and Janata Dal have accepted this as inevitability of the elections. But the Congress, in reality, will be happy if it can attain the status of single majority and gets the first chance of forming the government with its allies like regional parties of Ms. Jayalalita of Tamil Nadu

Mr Rao but simmering tensions will burst open if the party fails to form the government. The BJP too may find it tough going with its Hindu revivalism slogan for very long if its desperate bid for power fails this time and the organisation has to go for self-introspection in the event of failure to reach the South Block in the national capital. The leftists and the Janata Dal of more impeccable-integrity former prime minister VP Singh as well as the indira Congress of Arjun Singh and ND Tiwari will sit down after the results to take stock of their policies if they are dismayed by their performance.

The polls outcome will also indicate the future attitude of Rajiv's Italian widow Sonia Gandhi as regards to her approach to the Congress of Mr Rao and the faction known as Indira Congress since she seems to be watching the scene with her son Rahul and daughter Priyanka- both believed to swing into politics at an appropriate time in the future. Whatever verdict the Indian electorate gives, one thing is certain that the postelection scenario promises to be very interesting.

## Elections Cost Over Rs 2,500 cr

Still, the farce of the Rs 4.5 lakh limit for a Lok Sabha candidate goes on. A parliament constituency embraces roughly 10 lakh voters. The sum of Rs 4.5 lakh is not adequate even for a post-card to the voters. The Election Commission was realistic in suggesting to the prime minister to raise the limit to Rs 15 lakh.

EAWAR in Rajasthan is a dusty town, where roads are wide and people open-minded. But government is cussed. Scores of men and women, unmindful of election campaign, sit here on dharna to impress upon the authorities that they have the right to information, an issue which no political party has included in its poll manifesto.

The agitation began some time ago when the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, representing workers and farmers. found out that the money given to build roads, schools or health centres had gone to the pocket of middlemen and overbearing public servants. Some amounts were shown even against the labourers who had died many years earlier.

The demand of the protestors is that the development shown on paper should be visible on the ground. They want the right to photocopy on payment bills, vouchers and muster rolls so that they can scrutinise whether the allocation was spent correctly or spent at all. The havala scandal has made them still more conscious of corruption at high places than before and they talk about it in the context of candidates and

their choice. There is a connection between election expenditure and pilierage of state resources," says Mrs Aruna Roy,

national survey has revealed that the rural areas in Bihar, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh get only five to seven per cent of foodgrains disseminated through the public distribution The late prime minister

Rajiv Gandhi once admitted in public that the beneficiaries in the countryside receive only four annas in a rupee. But he was playing to the gallery, not wanting to find a remedy. Had he been serious, he would not have routed the kickbacks from the purchase of Bofors guns to Swiss banks and his Italian connections.

In fact, such transactions for black money and funds stolen from the government till in the name of development are the bane of fair elections. Congress has been the main culprit but other political parties also do not come clean. The current Lok Sabha election is an indication. It appears that no political party is short of funds.

Still, the farce of the Rs 4.5

into action once they knew the exact strength of Congress, the BJP and the Janata Dal-cumcommunists. Chief minister Shekhawat told me at Jaipur that if the Rs 64 crore havala transaction could buy top leaders, the multinationals had enough money to emerge as

another East India Company to

rule India. He also said that Muslims came to his meeting in large numbers. This may be because of his liberal image. Otherwise the BJP is anathema to the community. This is despite the fact that Hindutva is being put across as "cultural nationalism" and the mandir issue has been placed at the backburner.

This is the first parliamentary election after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992. UP, where the demolition took place was ruled by the BJP at that time and at the centre the present Congress government was in power. Muslims, who constitute nearly 12 per cent of the electorate, are dead against both. In a straight contest between the two — as is the case in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Delhi - they perhaps opt for Congress. But where they have a clear option, like UP, Bihar and West Bengal, they are supposed to vote for Mulayam Singh, Laloo Prasad Yadawand Jyoti Basu.

In Assam, the AGP has an edge over Congress. But the proliferation of candidates is likely to help chief minister Hiteshwar Saikia. Muslim voters, who constitute 35 per cent in the state, are generally anti-Congress. But they are likely to be taken in by Saikia's promise to give identity card to every 'foreigner' on the basis of 1990 electoral rolls. The Akalis in Punjab would have done better if the breakaway groups among the Sikhs had not fielded their own candidates. By adopting a categorical stand against secession first at Amritsar and then at Moga, the Akalis looked like weaning away from Congress the Hindu vote, nearly 40 per cent. But lately some statements by their leaders have spoilt the atmosphere; they appear to be against terrorism but not against terrorists.

No doubt, too many candidates, too many parties and too many factions indicate uncertainty in politics. Still, it may find a solution, however temporary, in a coalition. But what does one do about corruption? Villagers at Beawar have proposed transparency in government expenditure. This is probably the best suggestion that has emerged during the elections and needs to be fol-

## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be 'addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address

#### **Impartial** administration for fair polls

Sir. Success of the caretaker government will be manifested in its 'action'. The caretaker government, of course, will 'act' through the bureaucracy which it has in its disposal. Now, is the bureaucracy impartial enough to glorify the caretaker government? Widespread allegations in the form of reports published recently in the newspapers may be analysed. Allegedly, foreign missions fail to present a true picture of the recent developments of the affairs of our country — mass media like radio. TV fall short of producing impartial broadcast, telephones are being monitored, very few arms are being recovered, etc.

It is apprehended that in recent months "people of choice" were placed in key positions of the Administration through appointments, transfer and extension of service and these "people of choice" are hindering proper "action". The chairman of T&T was kept in position upon his retirement during the non-cooperation movement. Establishment Secretary and DG. National Broadcasting Authority were also granted extension of service recently. These are, of course, some examples and there are many more. On the other hand, officers supporting the recent movement are still holding key positions.

With such a picture of bureaucracy, one can only be too optimistic to expect that the caretaker government will be able to 'act' properly. As such, Election Commission, Establishment Division, Police Administration, National Broadcasting Authority, T&T Board,

DCs. TNOs must be made impartial for the sake of fair polls.

M A Qureshi 28, East Nakhalpara

#### Hawala scandal and our Supreme Court

Sir, The 'hawala' scandal of India unearthed by CBI continues to occupy important position in most of our national dailies but unfortunately no such 'hawala'-type scandal has been brought to light by our investigation agencies. The opposition political parties in our country often complain about alleged corruption by the party in power. But as soon as they come to power, nothing happens to those corrupt per-

The alleged corruption cases of Muslim League, Awami League, BNP etc., continue to get lost and none could be caught; instead, many politicians lead luxurious life in Gulshan, Baridhara, Banani or Dhanmondi who may not earn an honest living. However, the Supreme Court of India directed CBI, an agency under prime minister's secretariat, to report directly to the Supreme Court in respect of investigation. Against this backdrop, I am tempted to know whether the Supreme Court of Bangladesh can direct our investigation agencies in a similar fashion.

The urea fertiliser scandal for the past two consecutive years, diversion of all the primary education funds to one constituency, purchase scandals in all the cases, telephone tender scandal etc., continue to be published in many newspapers but could it be unearthed like CBI's 'hawala' episode? Only recently Supreme of India has directed

the Solicitor General of India to investigate about the alleged scandal in respect of allotment

of houses to journalists. Taking cues from our neighbouring country. I hope the caretaker government will promulgate an ordinance to ask all the top government officials, ministers and MPs of past regimes to declare their assets and liabilities.

Ahmadul Alam 14. Eskaton Garden Dhaka-1000

#### "On The Record"

Sir, I would like to ventilate my feelings about the article in the column "On The Record" published in The Daily Star on 28th April '96.

In his article Mr Kibria seems to have pointed his gun of fury at the BNP and its misdeeds during its last five-year rule. He seems to forget the other side of the coin. Just after the Liberation when there was no BNP and their armed party activists, we have seen the ballot boxes from DUCSU and Medical College elections were looted at gun point. Which armed activists did that?

The arms race is the legacy of that. We have also seen the arms recovery at that time. The armed terrorism in Dhaka University started at that time. The politics of armed "mastans" started in our country at that time.

Of course, like that time, now also the peace-loying, innocent citizens want a mastan and terrorist-free society. But what is the obstacle to that? Is it only the BNP? Or are others also equally responsible? The answer is obvious. Because only one evil in the society can't exist in a place where all others are good.

It is time to call a spade a spade. We have to go into the root of the problem. I would suggest Mr Kibria to change his one-sided view and do something positive to bring about new attitudes and outlook to the politics.

Malibagh Chowdhury Para. Dhaka-1219.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi who is leading the stir. "Funds

do not reach the field but they find a way to election campaigns." She has many examples to cite about false bills and vouchers, supported by the confessions of corrupt em-Rajasthan chief minister

Bhairon Singh Shekhawat is aware of it. He promised to punish the guilty long ago. But the tainted bureaucracy has not allowed any action. He recently offered to give copies of muster rolls free of cost. But that too is merely a statement so far. Top officials have made it a prestige issue. Thus corruption has got condoned.

Lack of action against corrupt bureaucracy is, however, not peculiar to Rajasthan alone. It is all over India. Bhopal gas victims are still suffering because of dubious procedures. Compensation for Narmada dam oustees remains entangled in the red tape that the rapacious public servants lengthen. Gandhian Sunderlal Bahuguna is so exasperated over the Tehri dam scandal that he has gone on a 49-day fast to make Prime Minister Narasimha Rao review the whole project, something he

had promised to do. Indeed, misappropriation does not allow funds for betterment to reach those whom the allocation seeks to uplift. A

lakh limit for a Lok Sabha candidate goes on. A parliament constituency embraces roughly 10 lakh voters. The sum of Rs 4.5 lakh is not adequate even for a post-card to the voters. The Election Commission was realistic in suggesting to the prime minister to raise the limit to Rs 15 lakh. But the resourceful prime minister had said no, even though every Congress candidate was reportedly getting Rs 5 lakh from the party. There is no limit placed on the party. although the Supreme Court in its latest judgment has said that the party must account for the money it spends on elec-

Travelling through several states, I found that the election campaign had picked up slowly. In the beginning, candidates were careful. Now they have thrown caution to the wind. Voters were confused over the prolificacy of certain candidates.

Estimates vary but the general impression is that the total expenditure of parties and candidates will be somewhere around Rs 2,500 crore, nearly 400 times of the amount discovered in the havala scandal. How much money will be required after the elections to buy MPs is anybody's guess. Many Indian and foreign outfits were in the queue to swing