

The Starting Team

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has chosen a small cabinet. With much less population Britain has just about double MPs and ministers totalling as much as three times over ours. Although in the next few days additions to both cabinet and out-of-cabinet ministers' ranks are expected, the size, we hope, would remain essentially small. The Prime Minister is, by this, placing quality over quantity and also sending a message that she has a family well in control, needing no pandering to ambitions of the brighter ones in her fold. This all is encouraging.

Many are the pressures and constraints, compulsions and considerations that exert upon the maker of such a choice. One wouldn't be wrong to say that the regions have not been well represented on the Cabinet or even that the zones returning AL hugely haven't been rewarded fittingly. The fact that the Prime Minister has been able to relegate these thoughts in order to pick up a team, speaks of a resolute person, one that we need very much at this moment.

How does one see and know merit which should be the only basis of forming the cabinet? For Sheikh Hasina the capacity and willingness to deliver — deliver with infallible transparency and without fanfare should count as merit. And an ability to deliver cannot come from other than having a very insightful and thorough knowledge of the charge given.

If that be the test of merit it stands to reason that some kind of shuffling should take place in the present team and that at least a foursome be brought in to unburden Hasina of her present heap. The modifications must all be geared to make administration responsive and dynamic — something that will visibly be different, radically innovative, unsparringly self-driving and dazzlingly clean. And except for the policy goals enunciated in the AL manifesto and in the speeches and pledges of its leaders, the whole of the remainder of governance is management. Each minister must be a manager *par excellence*, getting the best out of experts and bureaucrats and whole teams of functionaries running into tens of thousands.

Without passing any judgement on the merit of the team, we would like to point out that the present team does leave some lingering doubts in our mind about its ability to deliver in all fields. Sheikh Hasina must be made aware of this initial doubt, not to repeat this in the future selection.

Good Thinking

We must thank the World Bank mission chief Landell-Mills for his eloquent optimism about Bangladesh's growth prospects which is writ so large in his interview with The Daily Star that appeared yesterday. Two years on, with the adverse fall-out of the past worked off, the country's economic growth rate should reach 7 per cent with 'transparent policies and good governance' maintains the WB resident chief.

He has sifted the chaff from the grain in the Awami League policies and pointed out the pitfalls of the previous government as well, implying thereby that these should be avoided by the present ruling party by all means. We are glad he has not failed to take note of AL's resolve to improve the functioning of the parliament which when accomplished will certainly mark a vital step forward in establishing transparency and accountability in the whole system.

Then comes the question of carrying out adequate public sector and financial sector reforms in a context where the Awami League is wedded to a big role by the private sector supported by public sector services. Awami League's policy to give subsidies to poor farmers can do no harm if they are able to stave off the skimming by intermediaries.

Landell-Mills' emphasis on availability of good seeds, roads and markets in order to improve the cost: benefit ratio of agricultural operations should be well-taken.

The quality of investment should not be compromised by pandering to political considerations, a weakness the BNP government could not one quite rise above.

The new government must make it a point to be guided by the intrinsic worth of a project without giving in to vested interests or the frailties of so-called constituency nurture.

Boost in the CHT

The grid-lock over the repatriation of tribal refugees now languishing in the Indian state of Tripura to the CHT in Bangladesh should break now. The process ought to resume picking up the threads from where these were left off before the political crisis in the country had deepened to deflect matters off-course.

There is a positive combination of factors to hitch our hopes to: in addition to the victories of Awami League candidates in the CHT constituencies, the national government itself is AL. And a battle fatigue has also set in among the insurgency-prone Shantibahini elements. For all we know, the Tripura state government is keen on sending the tribal refugees back to their hearths and homes in Bangladesh and the pragmatist Deve Gowda government in the centre would only fall in line.

A fairly representative and comprehensive agreement exists between Bangladesh and India on the issue of repatriation. It can be implemented in full with complete assurance of security and advancement provided to the returnees by the new government in Dhaka.

It is time for the ceasefire to be extended by the Shantibahini leaders so that fresh talks can begin to end the embattled status of the area once and for all. The new government should be able to take care of the ethnic dimension to the problem.

Elections in Russia

If Yeltsin became the darling of the West, his nearest rival Gennady Zyuganov made them nearly lose their sleep.

THE just concluded elections in the largest country of the world — Russia — has failed to produce any result. Worse still, it has opened the floodgates of horse trading in the real sense of the term.

Russia has seen a few elections, western style, since the sensational collapse of the Soviet Union five years ago. The latest presidential elections was by far in a totally different league. Quite rightly it has been billed as the most important single event in Russia, whose impact will be felt worldwide.

Boris Yeltsin, the incumbent President, who was openly backed by the West, came out first as predicted but failed to get an absolute majority. He stood for continuation

val Gennady Zyuganov made them nearly lose their sleep. Unlike Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who caught the spotlight a few years ago by his ultranationalist rhetoric, Zyuganov maintained a low profile. He has received 32.31 per cent votes and will face Yeltsin in July in the run off. He is the Communist party candidate but it is a very different Communist party from the one which disappeared with the Soviet Union five years ago.

Today's Russia is going through a very difficult transition. All regimes which go through this transition, namely from a system which looks after its citizens from the cradle to the grave and knows no unemployment to a system of market economy, which is characterised by fierce compe-

brought cries of anguish.

Lebed gave the clear message of restoring law and order. Lebed appears to have a good hold on his voters and whichever side he throws his support will have an excellent chance of winning the run off in July. The appearance would tend to suggest that he will throw his weight behind Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin has held on tightly to the centre ground although he has suffered inevitably from the phenomenon of erosion of power, which he has held for the last nearly four years. He may also appear too pro-US for the Russian ex-General, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy saw his vote plummet to a mere 7 per cent but they are firmly in the camp of Zyuganov.



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

of the present policy initiated since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is open door policy and market economy from the command economy of the time of Soviet Union. It is working closely with the West. Indeed with Yeltsin in charge Russia and Eastern Europe are expected to have closer relations with North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). If not outright membership.

The West led by the US went all out in support of Yeltsin. The Russian media, still largely state controlled, gave all out support to Yeltsin. Boris Yeltsin taking advantage of his office of President took some far-reaching vote-catching measures. He announced the abolition of compulsory military service by the turn of the century, brought the Chechen leader in Moscow and signed a ceasefire agreement and campaigned in American style baby kissing, dancing with Russians in public with his huge frame.

Boris Yeltsin has received 34.90 per cent of votes. Since it falls well below the mandatory minimum of 51 per cent there will be a run off in three weeks time. In post-Communist Russia pollsters had a field day and finally they had settled for a Yeltsin winning by a margin of 10 per cent compared to the other contender. Russian voters have not obliged the pollsters.

If Yeltsin became the darling of the West, his nearest ri-

tion, the change-over is painful, to put it very mildly. A vast number of people are feeling the pinch in this largest country of the world. There is the problem of adjustment to the fall from the Superpower status to a position of almost playing second fiddle to the sole Superpower, the US. Zyuganov is telling his voters that the mighty nuclear power Russia has a larger role to play than be the camp follower of the US.

Similarly Russian voters see in him the leader who will ease some of the economic burdens brought in by the collapse of Communism. Russians are not alone in this line of thinking. Recent events in Eastern Europe, where Communist parties have risen from the ashes are a clear indication of this. The key to the future elections is reported to be in the hands of Gen. Alexander Lebed. He has campaigned a no nonsense law and order platform and has emerged as the dark horse by garnering 14.38 per cent of votes.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was not an ordinary event and along with the regime the law and order situation went to pieces. Moscow, one of the most orderly cities during the Communist days, turned into a highly insecure place, where thugs and bad characters roamed the streets openly. It appeared that society itself was crumbling, which

announced that he will support him. Yeltsin, for Zhirinovskiy, is someone who has gone too far in the US camp.

Mikhail Gorbachev was a presidential candidate as well but did not figure at all in the election results. With his *glasnost* and *perestroika*, in the late eighties, when he was the undisputed boss of the Soviet Union, he had set in motion events whose flowering we see today. Within a few short years he finds himself forgotten by his people and even reviled by many.

In July Russia will vote either for continuity or change. Continuity would signal more and more integration with the West in every sphere. That would be represented by Boris Yeltsin. Change would signal that Russia will not vote for status quo ante but would want her place in the sun, given her size and importance. It would also mean that the Russian voter will signal that he is ready to enter the struggle for a larger role than her present diminished status on the world stage.

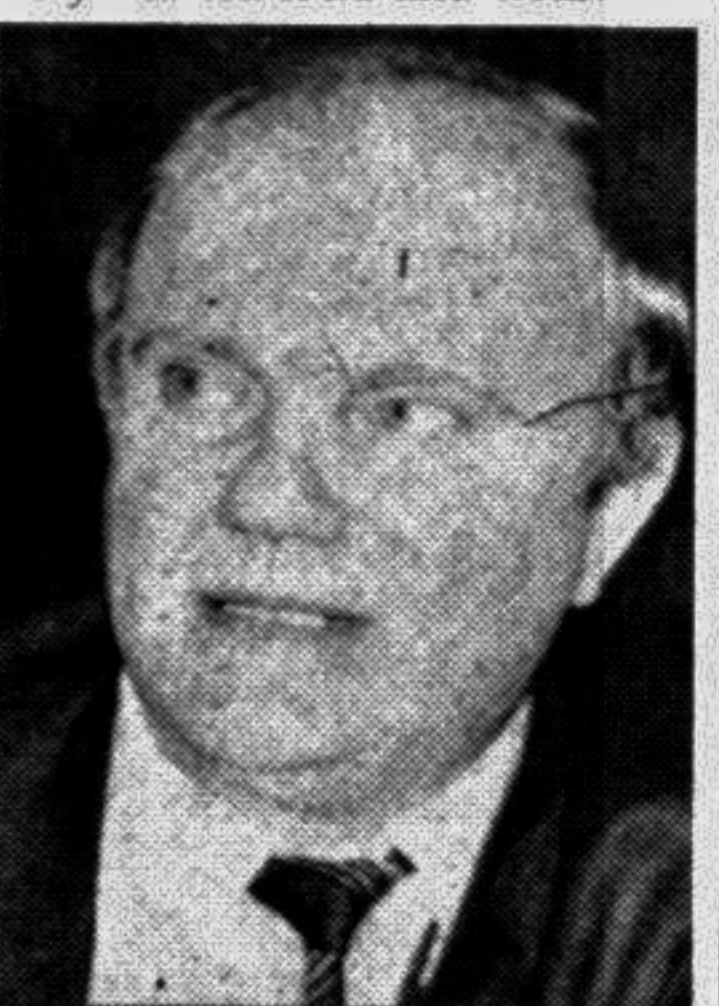
Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and near disappearance of the Communist party Russia appears to be groping for a new role. Does the recent reemergence of the Communist party, so soon after her catastrophic fall, signal that she is ready to assume that role? Russian voters in July will tell loud and clear.



Vladimir Zhirinovskiy



Boris Yeltsin



Gennady Zyuganov

Acid Test Ahead for the New Prime Minister

By Shahjahan Miah

PUTTING all doubts and suspicions at naught Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina has now been installed yesterday as the country's new Prime Minister. After the conclusion of the parliament elections finally on June 19 in a most free and fair manner under the Caretaker Government, Awami League emerged as the single majority party in the parliament and President Abdur Rahman Biswas invited Sheikh Hasina as the majority party leader to form the Government on June 22.

Bangladesh's political future almost seemed plunged into uncertainty due to what they call 'conspiracies' by some quarters to undo the process of franchise and peaceful transfer of power to the elected representatives.

Allegations of large-scale rigging in the elections by BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleida Zia created suspicion among the people about the fate of politics in the country. Begum Zia and some of her top leaders demanded repolling in 111 seats due to what they called 'unprecedented rigging' in those seats. Hundreds of observers from home and abroad, however, termed the polls most free and fair and said the well conducted polls could be

noticed that the signs and symptoms are already there. Law and order situation which improved a lot recently is again deteriorating. Big incidents of hijacking have taken place during the last few days in the capital city. Forces inimical to Awami League will be at work to deliberately create problems to disgrace the new government. So, it will be an acid test for Sheikh Hasina to run the country efficiently as the new Prime Minister.

If Sheikh Hasina commits herself to the service of the nation keeping watchful eyes on everything around, the people of the country will surely evaluate it in the right earnest. Putting Awami League back to power after a long time the people want to see how best Sheikh Hasina runs the country and how sincere she is on realising her pre-election commitments.

As the party remained out of power for long 21 years a tendency may grow in some people to seek their own fortunes. It is nothing new in the politics of the sub-continent including Bangladesh. The people are well aware of it and are quite tolerant. But they become intolerant when the fortune hunters with blessing from the ruling party only care

tolerance have no substitute. The most immaculate performance of Sheikh Hasina along with two of her most competent colleagues, Tofael Ahmed and Abu Hasan Chowdhury in the 'Sabonoye Jante Chai' TV programme on June 9 and her appealing speech the next day, no doubt, made some impact on the voters.

Besides running the country ridden with a mountain of problems, she has to turn her eyes to some urgent matters like Farakka issue. The new Prime Minister has to ensure just share of the Ganges waters from India and she has to prevent the big neighbour from building dams on the north and north-eastern border of the country. The realisation of Bangladesh's due share of waters can be the only answer against her party's alleged India-appealing policy by her political adversaries. She should bear in mind that there is no scope for her to deviate an inch from the commitments she had made before the polls. Deeds are better than words when the people get them in their dire needs.

The people of Bangladesh will watch with deep interest her commitment to establish a terrorism-free society and a corruption-free government.

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a model at the global level. They dubbed the allegations of rigging as baseless. But BNP said the report presented by the American-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) led by former US Congressman Stephen Solarz was biased and not based on facts. Mr Solarz and former Australian Foreign Minister Andrew Peacock, an NDI member, said the allegations of BNP against their team was unfounded and motivated. They firmly said their report represented the true picture on the polls.

About 21 years after Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was brutally killed along with the members of his family on August 15, 1975, Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina has assumed power weathering many adverse situations and upheavals. The new Prime Minister must remember that failure on her part to run the government efficiently will be most disastrous for her party as well as the nation, so she has to be very careful in every step. Deeply involved in politics from her very student life, Sheikh Hasina must have closely witnessed her illustrious father's eventful and glorious life.

She has also definitely marked how the heinous circle became desperate to tarnish the image of such a towering personality ever since Bangladesh took the rein of the government after returning home from gallows in Pakistan. Sheikh Hasina herself will agree how difficult it will be for her to run the country which her father found almost impossible to handle, confronting the conspiracies hatched by evil-doers, because the vested quarters will not sit idle.

for their well-being totally ignoring the interests of the people. The Prime Minister has to take this point into serious consideration and must maintain a strangle-grip over it.

The party leaders and workers have to be convinced of the simple truth that it is the people who can take a party into power and unseat it at their will. The first and foremost thing will be to win the confidence of the people and work hard to maintain that, in face of all sorts of propaganda by the opposition. The people of the country are sensitive indeed and at the same time tolerant too. They closely watch the sincerity of the promise-makers in realising their promises. The Awami League Chief will certainly not forget the promises she had made to the electorate and even if she forgets those due to genuine preoccupations, the people will never forget them. The place she has earned in the heart of the people by her sublime approach and modest speech during her electioneering can be made permanent only with demonstration of her foresight, wisdom and intelligence in running the state and the administration.

The sycophants have always enjoyed an upperhand everywhere, at all times and their stranglehold in Bangladesh is also widespread. Allegations are there that even man like Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, at one stage, became surrounded by flatterers. Sheikh Hasina must be on guard against these people and she has to be very choosy about the people she will be required to keep around her. In politics, generosity and

and to run the country on the basis of national consensus. Establishment of political accord on various important matters including making the educational institutions violence free and attracting foreign investment to the country can create new trends in the country's politics. Dialogue has to be started immediately in this regard with all the political parties. The significance of accord on some fundamental national issues among the political parties will be far-reaching. The attempt of Awami League to set this trend in the country's politics will be welcomed by the people.

The decision to keep the size of the cabinet within manageable limit also goes well in line with Sheikh Hasina's policy of cutting down the unnecessary expenditures. It is wiser to increase the efficiency of the cabinet members than mere increasing its size. The running of the statecraft with honesty and efficiency will not only enable Awami League to remain in power for the mandated five years, it may also help them come victorious in the turn-of-the-century parliament election.

No doubt, Awami League's coming to power will end the 21 years' indifference, often amounting to insult, to the father of the nation, and his invaluable contributions to the Bengali nation will rightly be evaluated. But the building of 'Sonar Bangla' as dreamed by Bangladesh will be the greatest tribute to his memories.

The new Prime Minister has to bear in mind that she is not only at the helm of her party's symbol 'boat', she is also at the helm of the country's government to steer it clear to safe and sound destination.

New Government: A View on the Priorities from Outside

Munim Kumar Barai writes from New Delhi

MILLIONS who were closely observing the electioneering in Bangladesh from outside, the June '96 event has clearly brought to them some historic messages. First of all, the highest number of voters' turnout in the polls is the expression of the people's desire for a decisive settlement of the political imbroglio that is haunting them for a quite long time. Precisely, they want peace.

Secondly, people of Bangladesh definitely want economic changes and prosperity. But changes cannot go without a human face. Thirdly, the election results send the signal that arrogance pays off in result to a certain level but not beyond that. To supplement this — when many have to share the water of the same pond and if someone wants to force others to drink muddy water then at some point or other, he/she may have to drink it bitterly. Finally, the nearly wiped out election performance of the Jamaat-Islami bears the important conclusion that extreme radicalism and forces against modernity have little acceptability to the majority of people who are fond and proud of their liberal cultural tradition.

In this set-up, the election victory of Awami League (AL) marks an important phase in the history of Bangladesh. The second home-coming of AL after being in a wilderness for over two decades does not mean that history will go back to 1975 when and where it was stopped, and start again. It cannot and should not be. It does not mean that what happened in between shall have to be reversed in a massive scale which will, without an iota of doubt, invite protest and dis-

ruption. But the mandate for AL in the election definitely has offered it an opportunity and responsibility to amend some distortions which have been very deliberately imposed upon the people of Bangladesh. Though it is expected that AL would be cautious with its steps at the beginning, but a delay in initiating few corrective steps could mean a loss of historic chance to start them.

Facts of Freedom
Within 25 years of our liberation, we might have produced a huge army of youths and

youngsters who have deliberately been fed with distorted and sometimes no information at all about our glorious struggle for freedom. The distortion was selective and systematic since 1975 when the process really began. What could be the result of this distortion? Let me relate two incidents before going to this point.

In the mid-1980s a survey was conducted among the Japanese primary school students of age group 8-9 years. Among many questions one was — 'who dropped the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima in 1945?' Fourteen per cent of the respondents replied that it was the former USSR! Though not quite similar but I got a bigger shock by one incident a couple of months back. In our dormitory in New

Delhi there lives another boy from Bangladesh. He is a product of a prestigious cadet college, has a very enviable academic background and is a die-hard supporter of Pakistani cricket. This year when Pakistan defeated world champion Sri Lanka in Singapore, a boy was seen running in the field with a Bangladesh national flag. I drew his attention to this. He got furious with me and in a fit of anger he asked, 'tell me, what the harm Pakistan has done to us? It was, after all, Sheikh Mujib who made three lakh killings into three mil-

lions. The reference was obviously and I was so shocked that I found no words for some time. Just see where our history has arrived. Every nation must be proud of its liberation struggle and depicting it correctly is a responsibility of the whole nation. Paying due homage and respect to the freedom fighters and upholding the national value based on historical facts and social customs never need over-emphasis. After all we fought against a trigger-happy alien force which committed one of the biggest genocides in the history of mankind. So time has come to see why the benefits of freedom have benefitted them most who in 1971 did oppose the struggle most. The AL has an immediate part to play. As it so far has

steadfastly stood for the spirit of freedom, now it can use at least for six months to one year the electronic media to let the post-liberation generation know our history. Let everyone get (his/her) place according to one's contributions to our nation.

Economic Issues
From all predictions and projections of the IMF, ADB, and World Bank, it could be gathered that 1996 is not going to be an economically good year for Bangladesh. The much propagated fiscal consol-

idation is now under cloud. Rates of inflation and unemployment are up, budget deficit is likely to increase. The process of economic restructuring has been slowed down, foreign investors are yet to gather confidence about the political stability of Bangladesh. The shortage in foodgrain production due to an ill pursued fertilizer policy (which cost the marginal farmers dearly, even some lives) and recurrent natural calamities is bound to create extra-pressure on the exchequer for footing the food bills. To make the matter worse, exports are likely to have a growth of only 12 per cent, down from 37.1 per cent registered in 1995.

In this context, a new government is taking over the power. So it has to be prudent

need to be brought at the focal point and equipped with the facilities of modern day production, transportation and communication. It is a difficult task but it can automatically solve many problems of our country.

Foreign Policy
This could be an area of dilemma for the AL. The existing policy needs no overhauling except policy matters on few issues. Our most urgent problem is Farakka. For the last few years no serious and sincere effort was made to solve this problem. But the issue was being used time and again only for political mileage. So except sufferings, people got nothing. A change is government in India and its avowed policy of close rela-

tionship with the neighbours can be best utilised if the issue is taken up immediately with the Indian government. We have two unresolved matters with Pakistan — the repatriation of three lakh Pakistanis to Pakistan and to get back our due share of assets held by it since 1971. These two are the unfinished agenda of our freedom fight. We have to generate enough international pressure on the Pakistan government to settle these matters to our satisfaction. The AL cannot have a forgetting and forgiving attitude in these matters.

With the advent of regional cooperation through SAARC and SAPTA, let the Indo-Bangladesh Friendship Treaty die a natural death. Do not forget that East and South-East Asia is emerging as the centre of economic gravity of the world. So our economic and foreign policies should give due emphasis to this fact.

Conclusion
As an independent nation we have already passed a quarter of a century with many of our dreams and promises unfulfilled. A majority of our population would be happy if they can satisfy their daily needs with a little ease. Well, they also need protection from the local touts and goons who have mushroomed over the years. But, you see, these are very minimum demands and no democratic government can be negligent to these requirements. The AL should not also overlook these matters. I have some words about the minorities of Bangladesh. These are the people whose sense of security, morale and confidence have touched the nadir in recent years. They can expect to get a fair treatment from the new government.