

Put Acrimony Behind

The nation should feel revitalised in the mind after the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Bangladesh's birth. The spontaneity, the emotional surge, the outpouring of a deep sense of pride and the feeling that finally we were uniting again for nation building marked the countrywide observance of the occasion. It was an event of a life time for most people who after many years could celebrate the culmination of our Liberation War in a befitting manner. The occasion also reminded us of the tremendous role that people of India and its armed forces—more than 4,000 of whose soldiers died for our freedom—played in our struggle and gave us an opportunity to recall their contribution with sincere gratitude.

It had an élan reinforced by the tenor the government set while its enrichment came from the celebrative programmes of the political parties, marked by a free airing of views, the peagantry at the official, community and professional levels and above all, the enthusiastic mass participation in the larger than-life-functions. The energy released and visions generated by the celebrations will have to be utilised before long.

Our impassioned call to the major political parties in particular will be that they scrupulously avoid politics which seeks to survive on a staple diet of acrimony and incremental creation of bad blood.

It is time for a political culture that caters to the basic needs of the people with the economy placed high on the list of agenda and divisive emotional issue dropped out of it altogether. After the silver jubilee celebrations which should be deemed to have whetted their appetite for the past, there should not be those back-tracking exercises anymore knowing full well that these sapped the nation's energy and distracted its attention from the development path. This will be unforgivable when the rest of the world seems sure-footed to embark on the next century as we wobble on our feet.

The celebrations interspersed as they were with grateful acknowledgment of the sacrifices so many people had made for the country's liberation, have raised the popular expectations of good governance to a higher notch, something which, we believe, the ruling party must have taken note of.

Welcome Annan, but.....

Kofi Annan, a Ghanaian, has won the UN Security Council's approval to become the next secretary general of the world body. Now there remains little formality before the longtime international bureaucrat takes over from the outgoing secretary general Boutros Boutros-Ghali on January 1, 1997. His choice for the top UN position, however, has not been without a hitch. Despite strong US backing for him, some members of the Security Council did not like the way Boutros-Ghali was forced to abandon his plan to seek a second term to the post.

Out of 15 members, 14 were in favour of Boutros Ghali's re-election but the US veto had been intrinsically far too strong for the SC to come on top. Only France tried to stand its ground but others had succumbed to the pressure. The US may be the only superpower today, but the way it has been using the prime world organisation to impose its will and exert its influence on others, does not augur well. The US has complained that reforms brought in the UN under Ghali's leadership were slow-moving and inadequate. The US made it known also that unless there was a change in the top UN post the Congress would not approve the release of American contributions owed to the organisation.

Kofi Annan who takes over after so much wrangling and internal squabble in the Security Council may not find the going easy nor could he be in an ideal position to deliver goods. Although the US is designated to be a major contributor to the UN fund, the size of its outstanding contributions looks bafflingly huge. Now that Annan looks like a US favourite can we expect that the country will pay all its outstanding contributions to the UN so that none of its programmes suffers in the future?

Deadly Business

Of the various harmful drugs that a large section of the country's population, particularly the youths, has become addicted to, phensidyl is most widely used. All because of its availability and comparatively low price. Surprisingly, however, this is not a local product; the drug comes from across the border. According to a report, this substance is smuggled into the country through various routes and, most worryingly, with alleged co-operation from members of the law enforcing agencies including the BDR.

So, here is a deadly business, profits from which go into many pockets and that is the trick of keeping the business alive by palm-greasing at various points. An international covenant makes it incumbent upon signatory member-countries — India and Bangladesh included — to actively cooperate in the fight against illegal drugs. Here is a case where both India and Bangladesh are unwittingly allowing the spread of drug abuse which poses a serious threat to the welfare of generations of young men and women in the two countries.

We, therefore, appeal to both governments to efficiently deal with the drug peddlers, manufacturers and consumers. The important task is to plug the routes of supply.

Before the menace from drugs turns worse, raising the spectre of the Columbian Cali Cartel-type, cut off its tentacles on both sides to avoid a great human and social tragedy.

Corruptions in Bangladesh: Origins and Cures

East Pakistan was virtually reduced to a municipality in terms of budgetary resources. The non-devaluation of Pakistani Rupee in 1949 was another blow to East Pakistan's export trade. A quarter million strong armed force was built up over the years with virtually a handful recruited from East Pakistan.

THERE is no doubt that corruption in Bangladesh has become widespread reaching every warp and weft of the administration. Although there are still some uncorrupt individuals in the administration, by and large it is perhaps true to say that people cannot get anything done without bribing the main who has the power to dispose of a file or to deliver some services. Similarly, outside the government administration, there is a hardly a profession left which has not been corrupted by unethical practices. Even the terrorists who forcibly extract heavy tolls from various sections of people seem to enjoy protection from the higher ups in the society and hence most of the time go scot free. It is utterly sad to see that bribe-taking and extortions have now become part of the culture, as it were. Although innocent victims may resign to corruption by thinking that he or she is powerless to do anything about it, it is high time that people in general become aware of its crippling effects on the economy and the society and the power they have to change it.

Quite apart from amassing vast amount of wealth through illegal means by some people, in terms of economics of production, the payment of bribes at different stages increase the costs of production which raises the supply price of goods and services. The results is the reduction of the economy's competitive edge. It helps those who can pay a lot of money in setting up an industry and wipe out those who cannot pay such bribes. Therefore, it promotes the growth of some giant firms and weakens or destroys the smaller ones in the market. All these lead to oligopoly-type structure of industries as opposed to a competitive structure in the economy with all its adverse effects on concentration of industries in a few hands and wrong income distribution in the society. A government which is committed to eradicate poverty, on the one hand, and remain soft on corruption, on the other, will eventually realise that the effects of the latter will negate the effects of the former. Corruption, therefore, has to be drastically controlled if poverty has to be eradicated, economic growth has to be speeded up, and social justice has to be achieved.

It is in view of such crippling

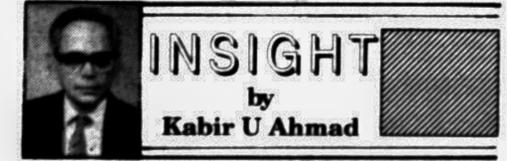
effects on the economy that no less a person than Mr Wolfenson, the current president of World Bank spoke in a strident voice against corruption in his address to the annual joint meeting of the World Bank and the IMF held in Washington D.C. in September. He sounded almost a warning to the representatives of the Third World countries about disbursement of aid if adequate measures were not taken against corruption in the Third World countries. This is the first time that a president of the World Bank has come out so strongly against corruption which none of his predecessors did. Although it should have come much earlier in the course of the World Bank's aid disbursements over the last three decades or so but still it is better late than never. One would like to congratulate the president of the World Bank for his bold statement against corruption. It is certainly a refreshing change in the attitude of the major donor agency towards the aid receiving countries of the world.

There are two questions that one would like to raise on corruption. (a) How has Bangladesh got into such a terrible state? (b) If it is not too late, then how to combat it? How has Bangladesh Got into Such a Corrupt State?

The simple answer is that it has inherited a legacy of corrupt politico-economic culture from Pakistan and furthered the same culture during the last quarter of a century of its existence. It would be appropriate to justify this statement briefly. The establishment of Pakistan was based on lofty ideals. It was supposed to be a land of the "pure", as the name itself suggested, with the promise of establishing the ideology of Islamic Socialism meaning equality and justice for all. Although in the election of 1946, Bengal was the only province that voted for Pakistan and none of the constituent provinces of West Pakistan did so, and East Pakistan having been the majority wing of Pakistan, immediately after independence Mr M A Jinnah took away the major revenue earning subjects

like custom duty, income tax and sales tax from East Pakistan on the plea that the new federal capital will have to be built up in Karachi. On the other hand, by far the largest share of the federal budget was being spent in Karachi and West Pakistan. East Pakistan was virtually reduced to a municipality in terms of budgetary resources. The non-devaluation of Pakistani Rupee in 1949 was another blow to East Pakistan's export trade. A quarter million strong armed force was built up over the years with virtually a handful recruited from East Pakistan. Trade and businesses were equally unfavourable to the people of this part of the country. All these measures set the stage for economic stagnation of the eastern wing while the

western wing was developing at a fast rate. It was in this background that the various political movements like the Language Movement of 1948, Constitutional Movement of 1950, Language Movement of 1952 and the provincial election of 1954 were taking place. However, series of games were played by the Central government against East Pakistan but didn't succeed in the face of resistance of the people. The decade of 1950s became a period of struggle for realising its rights within Pakistan, as well as of sacrifice, reassessment, and adjustment of its interests for survival within the framework of Pakistan. Corruption was not a major issue in the minds of the people of East Pakistan then.



Large-scale official corruption became the order of the day after the military take-over of power in Pakistan in 1958. This event also marked the beginning of the end of former Pakistan since the 1956 constitution, which embodied the last

who ruled the country for over 15 years practiced the same politico-economic game that they had learnt from their Pakistani leader which a political sociologist would call a post-colonial syndrome. Ziaur Rahman, who seemed to have good intentions, did not make money or indulged in corruption himself but could not control his non-descript and newly-recruited ministers and officials from corrupt practices and used to appeal to them to reduce corruptions. Such appeals did not work. However, his successor military ruler, who has been going through court cases on a number of charges, more or less institutionalised corruption. The moral foundations of the political economic and social fabric was systematically destroyed.

introduced seemed to have generated conflicting incentive mechanisms. He raised the high expectations among people in golden Bengal after independence which could not be delivered. He nationalised all industries, banks, insurance companies and major trade without having professional staff to manage them and hence the bureaucracy, who knew nothing about industrial management, had to be placed as managers with terrible consequences. In addition, large number of workers and junior and senior executives were placed in these industries which made all these establishments overstaffed and inefficient. These establishments became the hunting ground of all kinds of perks and corruptions. Ceilings of bureaucrats salaries were fixed at Tk 1,000 per month but double digit inflation was roaring in the economy because of heavy deficit financing and general supply shortage in all industries.

Later this ceiling had to be revised upwards; transport had to be provided, which has become a channel of huge drainage of government revenues even today; income taxes had to be "deemed to have been paid"; house rent had to be adjusted upwards etc. Investment ceiling was fixed at Tk 3 lakhs with which no one could run any business and had to be revised upwards. A Five-Year Plan was produced which had to be abandoned in less than nine months of its launching. The internal production fell drastically, exports dwindled and external reserves vanished. Finally, as the nail on the coffin, as it were, a famine occurred with a terrible effect on the economy and the society. There were too many controls and too little room for individual initiatives. Since all controls generate incentives to corrupt practices, even a man like Bangabandhu became powerless against such widespread force of corruptions in the society.

of the society have made acceptable to people what are morally unacceptable and punishable. Thought processes have changed and habits have been formed for taking bribes and grafts.

How to Combat It?

The way to combat corruption is to have a clean, incorruptible and bold political leadership who can not only withstand the powerful temptation of distributing favours to his/her relatives, friends and party supporters, but also can summon up courage to try and punish the corrupt people irrespective of their party affiliations. The second most important step is to strengthen the laws of the land and implement them properly. The third step is to moderate or relax all regulatory measures still effectively controlling the economic activities. The fourth step is to make the administration lean and efficient by cutting out unnecessary officers and staff from government administrative machineries and raise the salaries of the retained officers and employees sufficiently so that there is no temptation for bribe or graft. The fifth measure would be to introduce a fair system of "stick and carrot" for the officers, that is, the honest ones should be rewarded while the dishonest ones should be punished severely. All appointments and promotions should be purely on merits and not on partisan considerations. Finally, a social movement should be launched among the new generations, who will have to pay the price of corrupt practices of the past and present generations, to publicise the activities of the corrupt people and to socially boycott them in all possible ways.

These are tall orders, no doubt. But a beginning should be made by honest and visionary political leaders and the younger generations who are at the doorstep of the twenty-first century and will have to face a rough Darwinian struggle for sheer survival in a new world that is going to confront them. They have to get rid of this virus from their society in one way or another.

Run-up to Elections: Midway

The major political party PML (N) is far ahead, its main support base remains in the Punjab and to an extent, the NWFP. It remains weak in Sindh and Balochistan. Mian Nawaz Sharif has made tremendous forays in Sindh but it is difficult to explain away conspicuously corrupt Syed Ghouse Ali Shah as the Sindh PML (N) President.

FORTY-FIVE days or so after the demise of the Benazir regime, we still cannot seem to quite shrug off the nightmare of about 1100 days (3 years) that we have had to endure. An atmosphere of corruption and criminality was so all-pervasive that return to normalcy is like waking up with a hangover from a drug-induced sleep on the day after, you know that you are better off from the headache restraints you put on believing it fully as yet. Coincidentally, it took 45 days after the shooting down of the former PM's brother, Mir Murtaza to bring the aberration of Benazir's administration to an abrupt end. Will accountability be complete without bringing those dastardly conspirators to book who from behind the scenes manipulated and stage-managed the farce of her "victory" in the 1993 elections?

Moeen Qureshi (MQ), the caretaker PM nominee of the 1993 conspirators (among them MQ's protégé, the late COAS Gen Asaf Nawaz's brother and IMF/World Bank employee, Shuja Nawaz, also conveniently related to the then DG ISI, Lt Gen Javed Ashraf Qazi, by marriage) had a very simple mandate, to supposedly hold "impartial" elections and bring Benazir back to power. With Qazi suggesting most of the appointments while screening others, every effective post in a position to influence the elections was occupied by a PPP supporter. Ahmed Sadiq as Chief Secretary Sindh, as a smokescreen a facade of neutral, non-controversial personalities with acceptance potential in the west were chosen Federal Cabinet members, the simple expedient was to choose most of them from the Overseas Chamber Commerce and Industry. Contrived political turmoil had brought all the functions of the government to a halt in the period from April to July 1993. MQ simply revived the economic process by setting it free but not before the ex-World Bank employee signed away our economic freedom, far exceeding the 40 per cent budget deficit, 35% tariff base and ESAF funding at 0.5 per cent per annum agreed to in consultations with the IMF by the Mian Nawaz Sharif government in April 1993, before President Ghulam Ishaq Khan sacked the regime. MQ tied us into 4 per cent budget deficit and 35 per cent tariff base with much more expensive SAF funding, in effect he hamstringed the incoming government economically even before it came to power.

Saddled with such constraints, the country was beggared beyond description economically by the Benazir regime's corruption and ineptitude. In contrast to MQ's R and R (Rest and Recreation) in Pakistan the present caretakers agenda has been complicated by the persistent demand for accountability, managing to keep afloat even though the quality of the cabinet members raises questions of its capability. The Meraj Khalid combine has done "better than average" under the circumstances. Above all, arresting the rapid decline in the economic and restoring mass confidence. Even the Rupee-US dollar parity has stabilised, though one daresay when 3-5 million illegal funds is not flying daily from the country from the hands alone (a la Zardari), the Rupee had to become stable.

In the political scene, the field is now taking some shape. The major political party PML (N) is far ahead, its main support base remains in the Punjab and to an extent, the NWFP. It remains weak in Sindh and Balochistan. Mian Nawaz Sharif has made tremendous

forays in Sindh but it is difficult to explain away conspicuously corrupt Syed Ghouse Ali Shah as the Sindh PML (N) President. Once having a secure foothold in all the four provinces, the PPP has almost self-destructed due to the excesses of the Benazir-Zardari combine. PPP original has fragmented into two main factions, PPP (BZ) led by Benazir and PPP (SB) led by her sister-in-law, Ghinwa Bhutto. Only in NWFP will PPP (BZ) fight as a political party and that also because of the solo efforts of PPP Superstar Aftab Sherpao. PPP (BZ) stalwarts in other

provinces will only be successful because of their respective individual strengths not because of their party colours. The "Sindh Card" is now a figment of imagination in Ms Benazir deluded mind, she can keep playing with it, along with a number of other cards she claims is up her long sleeves, till hell freezes over. For the first time in its history, the party will be heavily dependent on individual leaders rather than the other way around. While some of them remain Benazir Zardari loyalists out of conviction, most are stuck with PPP (BZ) out of compulsion because no other party will accept them into their fold.

The late Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, was underestimated in the 1970 elections, cashing in on his "Roti, Kapra aur Makan" slogan

that attracted millions of voters to his party, mostly away from the PML. Imran Khan is similarly being not assessed as the serious challenger he is with his "Insaaf" slogan for Tekrik-i-Insaf (TI). Twenty-five years earlier Bhutto aligned himself with the masses who were anxious to break the hold of the feudals and to get basic necessities, bringing charisma into the electoral field that was lacking in then Pakistan. The plea for "freedom from feudals" is now Imran's domain, Imran bringing a much more potent charisma into the field and articulating a cry for justice that

The other phenomenon to emerge is Ms Ghinwa Bhutto. In life Murtaza was never a very credible political entity as he is in death. The late son of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was an abrasive, generally dislikable character given to arrogance, rudeness and high-handedness on the pattern of his late father and former PM's sister without having his father's brilliance and gift at politicking or his sister's charisma. With his death the Bhutto mantle has been snatched away from Benazir and seemingly passed to his good-looking personable widow who has caught the mass imagination in the Sindh heartland, particularly by her stoic self-control after her husband's violent death. Late ZAB is an icon in the Sindh heartland, as the widow of Mir Murtaza and the mother of Zulfiqar, she has taken over the political momentum lost by her sister-in-law. With support from other anti-Zardari forces in Sindh, she stands set to dent Benazir's Sindh political credentials. A mutually beneficial election adjustment rather than an alliance with Imran Khan seems to be a distinct possibility. The bridge may well be an original PPP stalwart, the much respected Mairaj Mohd Khan.

Altaf Hussain's MQM and its tremendous urban vote bank in Sindh remains intact. Setback by the appointment of Mumtaz Bhutto as CM Sindh, MQM need to keep their cool to keep intact their bloc of 12-14 National Assembly and 29-30 Provincial Assembly seats. Maturity at the leadership level is needed to come in out of the political cold. An election alliance or adjustment with PML (N) and/or Awami National Party (ANP) or

seems to strike a chord in the heart of almost every Pakistani. Imran bridges a crucial gap between what is opined in the western media as fundamentalist forces with that of moderation and the timing is just right. Instead of PML voters, sustained by a confident Mian Nawaz Sharif, hundreds and thousands of disenfranchised PPP hard-core, the faithful who really believed in the Bhutto promises till Zardari's grubby hands dived into the treasure till, are mainly deserting to TI. Imran's problem is to find credible candidates to harness this mass support and convert it into Assembly seats. The vast lead of the nearly intact PML (N) notwithstanding, he becomes a credible opposition, in their urban areas strongholds.

solidly with them throughout their hour of need. The ANP-PML (N) alliance has problems about seat allocations, they should be able to work out the differences. ANP's vote bank is more or less secure even without its base of secular support from Afghanistan. The Jamaat-I-Islami (JI) has an option to support either one of the two mainline rightist parties. In 1993 the combination of religious parties had played a spoiler's role in splitting the right wing vote for PML (N), ostensibly at the behest of then DG ISI Lt Gen (Retd) Javed Ashraf Qazi who promised Qazi Hussain Ahmad a virtually free hand in Afghanistan as a reward pro quo. This time no such apple is being dangled. Qazi Sahib may decide it is more convenient to have an election adjustment with either PML (N) or TI.

For the JI-led alliance that may mean an extra 6-7 seats but for Mian Nawaz Sharif or Imran Khan it may mean as much as 12-15 seats more, especially in Punjab's urban areas. Among the most important of the rest of the political slate, the leader of JUI (F) Maulana Fazlur Rehman will have to endure the embarrassment of fighting former screen sex symbol, Musarrat Shaheen.

While it is too early for safe conclusions, PML (N) would seem to be short-of an absolute majority but will be in best position to come to power with MQM and ANP support. Imran Khan's TI ends up neck and neck with PPP (BZ) to be the second largest party while Ghinwa Bhutto's PPP (SB) emerging as fourth in size in the Assemblies but with a possible majority in Sindh. Forty-five days is still a lifetime away and who knows what the accountability scorecard of elimination will be. Until we know for whom the tolls, the final tally will remain at best a guessing game.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

Provinces will only be successful because of their respective individual strengths not because of their party colours. The "Sindh Card" is now a figment of imagination in Ms Benazir deluded mind, she can keep playing with it, along with a number of other cards she claims is up her long sleeves, till hell freezes over. For the first time in its history, the party will be heavily dependent on individual leaders rather than the other way around. While some of them remain Benazir Zardari loyalists out of conviction, most are stuck with PPP (BZ) out of compulsion because no other party will accept them into their fold.

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To the Editor...

The pessimistic view: 25 years of waiting

Sir, The beleaguered nation celebrated the Silver Jubilee of Victory Day. The hallowed politicians made a lot of noise about it. Having failed to deliver the good expected from them, they rather have forfeited the trust of the nation. They have been trying to come back for decades, but the political culture is flowering too slowly for an underdeveloped nation. Like the proverbial cat, I had a few lives. I should have been dead several times while performing my duties, along with my colleagues, in public interest, during those nine months of guerrilla fighting, under continuing pressures from both the sides saying "Stop it", and the other side saying "Carry on". We had to seek shelter in the trenches during the air raids on the vital installation where I worked, later coming out with my colleagues to repair the damages and keep the service going. One of the col-

leagues later had to sacrifice his life, and the other survived, but part of his brain was blow-up. Today we see little signs of liberation from the vicious political stalemate of the two major political parties, led by the two charismatic ladies, living on borrowed names. So long the people indulge in this type of political loyalty, the country cannot move forward with a tuned and united step towards greater and faster development, for the realisation of which millions of us dedicated ourselves and suffered. We tend to live in the past. Even the President thought it prudent to hint on this sad state of affairs in our leadership. The party comes first; even an elected government was sought to be thrown out after three years of governance, through violent street agitations, and resigning from the parliament on grounds not clear to a large percentage of the voters. The aggrieved party is surely out for a vendetta (why not, as we know human nature?); so

that the next couple of years ahead does not look very bright from the common citizen's point of view, watching the intrigue in the palaces. Even now, within six months of the new general elections, the situation does not look very optimistic on the political front. We have become hostages to charismatic leadership, surrounded by the same old guards, who harp on techniques of self-preservation. There is no breath of fresh air in the political environment. Because there is no room at the top. Only democratic processes can create space in front. Nobody talks about it; especially our non-political and non-partisan intelligentsia (where are they hiding?). The later itself appears to be poorly raised. In this area also, the President has thrown some hint. The cult of violence appears to be gaining some legitimacy, unfortunately. This area must be made absolutely transparent, otherwise many innocent and dedicated lives may be lost

unnecessarily, because the killers do not care for principles. Today there is no third moral force to influence the errant politicians. Unless the vicious cycle is broken, there will be no liberation from the clutches of the vested interests. At the end of my life, I feel disillusioned at the pranks of the politicians. Can they deliver the goods? This is their last chance, because we impoverished citizens have not the capacity to bear any more crisis after crisis. A breakdown means starting afresh. The ball is in the court of the political leaders. An observer Dhaka "KLM, Biman and business"

fear some form of exposure-complex or reprisal. Let me assure him that Bangladesh is a relatively open and democratic society where people will pay heed to his opinions and not hold these against him, as is the case in many other countries around the world. Regarding the KLM affair, while I do not profess to know the matter in detail, I have been following the case, and I got the impression that KLM acted in haste. Clearly, there was a breakdown in communications and KLM should have made greater efforts to expedite and resolve the issue through negotiation rather than giving an abrupt and provocative press statement in early December through the country manager, the contents of which were rejected by Biman. It is pointless to apportion blame in such matters where both sides have valid grounds for complaint, and far wiser to talk through to a solution. There are now a number of foreign carriers operating to Dhaka and as far as I

am aware, they are doing so because it is a profitable and lucrative sector. Finally, while I accept the letter writer's contention that Bangladesh is not an easy country to do business in and that there is much to be done to improve the investment climate, what he/she must appreciate is that Bangladesh is a developing country where many people are quite aware of the difficulties to be overcome and are making concerted efforts to improve working and living conditions. In this context, the attempts of the BOL to attract foreign investment are most certainly not a "joke", as the writer puts it. It is the writer implying that until conditions in Bangladesh improve, no one should try to attract foreign investment? I should hope not, because in that case many countries, and not just Bangladesh, should shut down their respective BOLs for many years. A Ahmed 75/2 Indira Road Dhaka