

## President's Call Resonates

**P**RESIDENT Shahabuddin Ahmed has once again hit the nail on the head, this time perhaps more forcefully than before with the new millennium zooming in on us. While addressing a seminar organised on Saturday by the Society for International Development on the topic "Bangladesh in the 21st Century: Socio-Economic Perspectives", the President made out a strong case for national consensus wondering why the political leaders should allow their professional rivalry to degenerate into personal animus.

His apprehension seems to be that we shall be thrown by the wayside as the new millennium approaches us should the two major players on our political scene fail to seek cooperation in place of confrontation and exchange of accusations that have become a trade-mark of their thoroughly embittered relationship. In working democracies around the world, a degree of bipartisan understanding is forged and carefully retained on some vital issues of national interest, regardless of any lean patch the major political parties undergo from time to time. This stands in good stead not just for the sitting government but also for the opposition who might form government at a future date. It is an investment in the present and future.

The President fully echoes our sentiments when he urges the key players in country's politics to take a unified stance to abjure the use of students and workers for political purposes. This, together with a 'no' to muscle-power, will bring about equanimity at the national political platform and restore peace to the campus and work-places clearing the deck for all-round national development.

We think the President's wise words of counsel especially need to be heeded at this juncture when the national politics is at its confrontational worst threatening to engulf life in a deluge of anarchy.

## PM's Work Schedule

**W**ITH five ministries and divisions, and five more departments under her direct supervision, bureaucratic drudgery surely consumes a substantial segment of the prime minister's daily life. The present arrangement requires her approval for even the overseas trips of government officials down to the rank of an additional secretary. It certainly leaves her pressed for time to discharge her responsibilities in matters related to policy planning and implementation. By recommending a restructuring of the prime minister's work schedule, the Public Administration Reforms Commission (PARC) has indeed drawn attention to an issue that touches on the concern for effective governance.

True, the ministries of defence, establishment, power, energy and mineral resources; the cabinet division and the prime minister's office; bureaus of anti-corruption and NGO affairs, the Board of Investment, EPZ authorities and the National Security Intelligence — are all important state establishments needing the PM's constant attention. However, there appear to be some routine work that she does now which could easily be delegated to the ministers, secretaries and designated chiefs concerned. The Rules of Business demands the prime minister's attention to issues related to different ministries as the head of the government. Besides, as the chancellor of several universities and the chief executive of the state, she has to make important decisions on policy matters. Therefore, relieving her of relatively inconsequential routine bureaucratic matters would certainly give her the much-needed space and time to apply herself more on policy and governance issues.

An ideal democratic set-up calls for delegation of authorities and the PARC recommendation has stressed that point most convincingly. In line with the World Bank's *An Outline of Efficient Government*, the commission favours a selective flow of issues into the PMO to enhance the government's efficiency and activism. The PARC recommendation should be accepted without ado.

## Treatment to Sharif

**P**AKISTAN'S deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has complained of 'horrific' living conditions at the Malir prison in southern Karachi where he has been kept by the regime that overthrew him on October 12. The former head of government has demanded better treatment from the authorities. His lawyers have reportedly decided to argue in the court that he was not receiving the level of treatment 'guaranteed under prison rules of Pakistan.'

After all, the accusations against Sharif still remain to be proven. Nawaz Sharif has many more court appearances to make before a verdict is reached on the charges of treason and hijacking being levelled against him. He is a suspect until proven guilty and is entitled to treatment as admissible under the prison code of Pakistan, no more, no less. Besides, there is a question of civility, propriety, and respect for law involved in regard to a deposed prime minister undergoing a legal scrutiny. He was voted into power by the Pakistani electorate and in deference to his status deserves a better treatment than he is allegedly receiving now. The regime may deem it fit to issue a clarification to remove any misgiving on this count.

# Russia's Spectres of Disintegration

*Several dozens of corporate-oligarchic semi-states have been created in the country as a result of spontaneous decentralisation trends which have grown since the end of 1997. This is especially true of the regions with extreme climatic-physical conditions — mountains, deserts, tundras etc. Some of the people living in such regions know nothing about the country whose citizens they are politically.*

**T**HE Soviet Union's disintegration in 1992 was widely perceived as an inevitable consequence of her defeat in the Cold War. While it could have been partially true, a vital aspect of reality is obscured by this notion. The old Russia which grew into Soviet Union after 1917 was, after all, an empire in itself. During the fifteenth century Ivan the Great, the Grand Duke of Moscow, laid down its foundation by driving out the Mongols of Golden Horde. Since then it only expanded — first, to the Northwest and South under Peter the Great who conquered most of the European part of Russia in search of an outlet to the Baltic and North Sea and then the vast wilderness in the East. Till the end of nineteenth century, Russian dominion continually spread eastward and eventually reached the Pacific. In Central Asia it touched the foothills of the Hindukush and in the south it pushed at Turkish frontier. The Ottoman empire which flourished almost simultaneously has since disappeared. Russian empire, however, endures till date under various garb.

But then it is a universal trend that all empires disintegrate, sooner or later. The self decomposition of mighty Soviet Union has apparently been the prelude to that process. It is true that in the USSR's dissolution a fatal role was played by Gorbachev-Yeltsin confrontation in which an ambitious Boris Yeltsin wanted to take first place in the hierarchy of power even by breaking up Soviet Union. However, the first blow at the USSR's integrity was dealt in June 1990 when under the aegis of Yeltsin the Declaration on the sovereignty of Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was adopted. Even when the USSR's constituent republics fell apart to become independent states Russia still remained a lumbering

giant — still the world's largest country covering as many as eleven time zones. The Soviet disintegration hardly reduced the vastness of Russia — the USSR's core republic and its successor state. The Russian Federation still comprised 21 republics, six territories, 49 regions, two Federal-status cities, one autonomous region and 10 autonomous areas. In other words, it has even now 89 unwieldy, asymmetrical entities incorporated in it. In has in it a bewildering variety of nations and nationalities stitched together, its physical geography stretches over equally diverse landscapes — mountains, deserts, steppes, tundras and so on. However, the edifice has at long last been crumbling — silently but inexorably.

The declaration of Russia's sovereignty in 1990 almost at once set in motion the process also of the disintegration of Russia itself with an overwhelming majority of Russia's national autonomous republics proclaiming their sovereignty by the end of the year. The conditions for further disintegration of Russia were created by the new Constitution of Russia framed in 1993. The article 5 of the first chapter of the constitution's first section stipulates that 'a republic is entitled to have its own constitution and legislation'. It further states that territory, a region, a federal-status city, an autonomous region and an autonomous area are entitled to their own statute and legislation'. The Constitution has also granted the treaty-based relations between the federation and 'sovereign' republics.

As a result of such liberal constitutional provisions Rus-

sia's 'sovereign' republics immediately and openly announced their secession or the right to secession. This was most firmly codified by the constitutions of the republics like Tyva, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Other constituent members of the federation like Dagestan, Komi and Ingushetia proclaimed themselves the sovereign participants in foreign policy and external economic relations. According to the constitution of Yakutia and Northern Ossetia their presidents adopt decision on the stationing and movement of military units in their respective territories. The republic of

the federation enjoy all kinds of benefits and privileges just by virtue of the treaties on delineation of the terms of reference and powers between federal and regional authorities. Such partisan treatments of some of the constituent members dislodge the federation off its moral high ground and weakens the central authority. Also otherwise the management of the federation comprising 89 members is rather difficult. This difficulty is also due to the obsolete principle of administrative-territorial division of the country, particularly its inaccessible regions. The principle was first used in

ten regarded as an evil and a curse when viewed in the backdrop of scattered and sparse northern settlements. Here the populated settlements are separated from one another by vast tundra the crossing of which on surface route is indeed dangerous. It is, in fact, a demographic desert between very densely populated Asian and North American countries at the crossing of numerous continental economic routes. It is in this area that Russia has to compete in the 21st century with Japan, the USA and China — the countries which strive for economic hegemony. An economically collapsing Russia seems to be no match in this hyper-competitive game and is likely to lose control over this vast area.

Russia's integrational problems get compounded also with Soviet disintegration because of the disruption of a common Soviet infrastructure that existed earlier. For example, even South Siberia has now lost many ties with the Centre. 1150km Kansk-Ekibastuz-Tambor super high-voltage line which once connected them is now situated in another country, Kazakhstan, together with two of the three railways which used to link Siberia with Moscow. The Omsk-Yekaterinburg section of the Trans-Siberian Railway which Russia has preserved has neither adequate carrying nor traffic capacity. Under changed geopolitical circumstances the future integrity of Russia is contingent upon searches for fresh latitudinal forms of management tying the outlying territories with rich mineral resources to the Centre.

Strangely, the country's federal structure has been a power-

ful factor of Russia's political disintegration since 1996. Before that federation members were governed by the governors who were appointed by the president. These governors were accountable to the president. The governors began to be elected from 1996. So, in reality the regions are now governed by the stooges of local criminals, groups, clans and elites pursuing their local interests. To make things worse a chain reaction of more centrifugal tendencies began in 1998. One region after another announced the discontinuation of tax payments to the federal budget. Even the all-powerful president of the federation could not dismiss the defying governors.

Several dozens of corporate-oligarchic semi-states have been created in the country as a result of spontaneous decentralisation trends which have grown since the end of 1997. This is especially true of the regions with extreme climatic-physical conditions — mountains, deserts, tundras etc. Some of the people living in such regions know nothing about the country whose citizens they are politically. The country's regional enclaves independently regulate the movements of goods through their respective territories and subjugate to themselves the local officials of federal structures.

It happened more than once in the history of Russia that it either split into several parts or was exposed to such a threat. Its latest disintegration began after February 1997 revolution with different kinds of new entities springing up within its borders. Surprisingly, each time Russia found forces for self-restoration as an integral state. What is more, it came out of each period of disintegration more united and stronger than before. But, can she do it this time when the forces of the history are against it?



## PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

Tyva even codified its right to declare war, introduce Martial Law and adopt its own law on military service. Some of the republics also introduced the procedure for the declaration of the state of emergency in their respective areas.

The advantages of the reforms and extent of power to be enjoyed by the states are also unequally divided between the federation members making the federation vulnerable to pulls and pressures by the constituent members. Such inequality was created through power delineation treaties during the presidential election campaign in 1996 presumably to bargain votes in exchange of favour to be dispensed with. As a result, some of the members of

Siberia in eighteenth century. At that time the areas ruled by the governors were logically created along the length of the Yenisei and Lena rivers. However, the latitudinal Trans-Siberian Railway and Baikal-Amur Main Line as well as northern sea-route have since become the main transport avenues of Russia's north-Siberia while the resource producing territories are subordinated to the regional capitals situated far to the south from them. North Siberia is yet to be developed whereas South Siberia has already passed through several stages of development. This distortion in development is certainly disincentive to integrational efforts, if any.

Russia's spaciousness is of-

# Making the Federation Effective

*In creating more provinces and doing away with quotas we not only ensure parity but enter the new millennium as genuine and equal partners of a Federation made much more effective and viable. To quote Gen Burki "we need unity through the will of the people, where people feel secure and do not nurture fears of domination of one race by the other".*

Materially, serious imbalances exist in the relative levels of development in the different Provinces. Urban growth is much more pronounced than rural development, leaving agriculture, the backbone of the economy, relatively neglected. When one unit was broken up in 1968 by Gen Yahya Khan, it was too little too late, the four Provinces were still too large either population-wise or area-wise to administer, decisions even on the smallest proposals or problems of the rural areas were referred through the Provincial capitals to Islamabad. Seldom forthcoming quickly if ever, the time-lag in decision-making was disastrous.

Over-centralisation deepened the already existing feeling of deprivation in the smaller Provinces and outlying districts and the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of administration down the line became more and more manifest. At present Punjab, with 60 per cent of the population, is accused of domination by the smaller Provinces. The previous regime rarely reached out to anybody without a Model Town and Kashmiri pedigree, then one of Lahore, the perception in the other Provinces was of largely Punjabi domination. Punjab became the target of mass animosity, though for the most part the Punjabi masses suffer the same deprivation and discrimination as anyone else in the Federation. For the Federation to survive, this feeling of disenchantment must be replaced with the warmth and affection that first bound Pakistan together as a unique experiment in nationhood for the first 20 years of the existence

despite many aberrations. Maj Gen (Rtd) Masood Burki's book "Blueprint for Viable and Stable Pakistan" makes very cogent arguments based on a comprehensive study of case-histories such as Switzerland, Belgium, India and Nigeria, populated like Pakistan by diverse people having different languages and cultures. Switzerland has German, French, Italian and Roman languages and culture. Like the Punjab (60%) in Pakistan, Switzerland is dominated by the Germans (70%) but the country is divided into 26 cantons. Similarly Belgium has two distinct centres, French

a civil war (Blafr) earlier (in 1966) than Pakistan (in 1971), went from three regions to seven States to 19 States before a semblance of unity and cohesion could be achieved. Punjab has become unwieldy with too much administrative power concentrated in Lahore, development being largely in the urban areas at the cost of the rural areas. With population more than the other three provinces combined, Punjab has created a psychological mindblock among them, the other smaller provinces little realising that the outlying districts of Punjab are perhaps worse affected. In Balochistan

Moreover he has asked for all the Ports to be Federal-administered territories. He has got a reasonable balance between population and area size, recommending that the Federal Government exercise control over, viz (1) Defence, (2) Foreign Affairs, (3) Currency and Fiscal Policies, (4) Trade and Commerce, (5) Policy, (6) Federal Railways, (7) Federal Highways, (8) Water and Power, (9) Education, only basic policy, and (10) TV, Radio and Telecommunications. The Provinces would have viz (1) Agriculture, (2) Irrigation, (3) Power Generation and Distribution, (4) Trade and Commerce, (5) Provincial Taxation, (6) Local Government and Provincial Highways. He missed out Home Affairs (or Interior) and Aviation but that should be concurrent subject.

Instead of bureaucratic and appointed judges there is a dire need to have elected figures in administration and justice, keeping in mind that some of the smaller units may require stop-gap arrangements till their own cadres come up to scratch. In partial modification of Gen Burki's proposals and on the premise that there will be no right of secession, the National Assembly (NA) taking over any Provincial Govt if the NA feels sovereignty is endangered, there is need to increase the number of Provinces. Punjab should have five Provinces centred around Rawalpindi, Lahore, Sardogha, Gujrat and Rahimyar Khan. Sindh should have two provinces centred around Karachi (less the Port and adjacent areas) and Hyderabad (Keti Bundar must be with Hyderabad). Similarly NWFP should have two provinces cen-

tred around Peshawar and Abbottabad. Balochistan should be split into two provinces centred around Quetta and Kalat, for a total of 12. The Northern Areas (Gilgit/Skardu Dir/Chitral/Swat) constituting a separate Province, making it 12 in all. The Federal territories should include Islamabad, Karachi Port/Adjacent areas and Gwadar.

There may be all sorts of arguments about spending more on Governors, Chief Ministers, Ministers, Assemblies etc but this is a necessary price not only for better administration but also for development. Even our smallest Provinces will be larger than 50 to 75 countries of the world. Each Province should have its own Assembly, the size varying according to population. The leaders of local government must act dually as Administrators and Assemblers. To give equal opportunity to each Province in the Federation they must have Members of National Assembly (MNA) as per a set delimitation as well as five Senators each in the Senate, all duly directly elected and two technocrats each (one male, one female) directly elected. The Federal Territories will have five Senators, two each for Islamabad and Karachi Port/Adjacent area and one for Gwadar (plus 2 technocrats). There should be no quota except for one or two genuinely backward areas and that too only a nominal one. Merit should be the only qualification for recognition and appointment. In creating more provinces and doing away with quotas we not only ensure parity but enter the new millennium as genuine and equal partners of a Federation made much more effective and viable. To quote Gen Burki "we need unity through the will of the people, where people feel secure and do not nurture fears of domination of one race by the other".

## AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

speaking Waloons (44%) and Dutch speaking Flemish (55%) but it has nine provinces inclusive of both the languages and cultures in each province. At the time of independence in 1947, India had seven provinces and a few Union-administered territories despite 24 distinct languages. For better administration and to ease ethnic diversity, 15 more provinces have been created and the Union territories increased to nine. Even now India needs to increase the number of Provinces as the dozen or so secessionist problems (Nagas, Mizos, Assamese, Bodos, Manipuris, etc) are far from being solved. Kashmir being a different matter altogether.

Nigeria, which went through

there is polarization between Baloch and Pakhtoons with the people of the Mekran Coast a separate entity altogether. In Sindh, the divide is more between ethnic Sindhis and Mohajirs, though in Karachi many more nationalities exist. In NWFP there is a divide between the (1) Peshawar valley extending upto Attock and (2) Hazara Division, the DI Khan area being completely apart. Development is more diverse in Punjab than in Sindh, where it is in Karachi and Hyderabad mostly. In Balochistan only in Quetta and in NWFP only in Peshawar. Gen Burki has recommended 17 provinces but has included Azad Kashmir but one feels this should be kept as a separate entity.

## 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.

## Electric power management

Sir, 'Action Plan for Performance of BPDB: An Analysis' by Dr. Gdham Mohiuddin and Md Nurul Haque (DS, Nov 10) was interesting and informative. Publicly expressed views of other experts, both foreign and local, would help the formation of correct public opinion on this vexed problem of huge system losses (both human and technical) prevailing in the government-controlled electrical power sector since the country started developing noticeably in the 1990s. Now the power sector is passing through a crisis stage, limping from crisis to crisis, and in the process of giving birth to panic schemes. It is alleged that there are fundamental loopholes in the IPPs with regard to the operation in the private sector.

The bifurcate exercises of the huge bureaucratic PDB into DESA, DESCO, PGCB and REB have to be reviewed carefully, as very few professionals and experts from outside are being inducted; only in this game of musical chairs, the number of chairs is increasing and more and more musical-chairs groups are being formed. The operating and management climate or environment has to be changed. The weaknesses of input to the

computerised system has been pointed out (deliberate human errors and data fed into the computer).

The monitoring systems in developing countries are poor, inefficient, inefficient, both technically and from the management point of view; with the policy makers hardly interested. Asking the technical head to look after is not enough. The regulatory system is worse; both due to a common factor: lack of discipline and dedication to professional duties. The awareness and the training are there, but these are not enough. In general, the work culture has to be developed.

What is noticeable is that while there are seminars on topics galore, two sectors are not getting the public limelight: the mysterious telecoms sector (BTB), and the high-pilferage electricity sector (controlled by PDB). The vested groups in these two organisations have to be exposed, but it is difficult to do so if connivance of the higher authorities is involved.

Like the inability to tackle the powerful bureaucratic steel frame (BGS) the political bosses find it difficult to manage these technocrats. Transfer of these two businesses to the private sector is also taking time due to reasons well understood. Foreign advice works up

to the general principle level, but then comes the local factors, which complicate matters, as our main problem is human, not technical. A machine can be controlled and its behaviour pattern predicted, but not so in human personnel. More so in the LDCs.

Abul M Ahmad  
Dhaka.

## Moral heritage

Sir, The idea abroad is that our moral heritage is fast disappearing, leaving nothing worth for children. Respect for moral heritage requires that our values be regarded as a matter of faith and a matter of taste.

We are increasingly becoming unable to talk about our national unity, common stance to rebuild our nation, corruption-free society, legitimate performance of our parliamentarians, or teachers decimating knowledge to students and teach how to learn without using the who has power and whom the powerful victimise.

Syed Wailullah  
Dhaka.

## Vital centre

Sir, This is in response to the article 'The Bangladesh Nationalist Party: Quest for the 'Vital Centre' by M Rashiduzzaman published on 14th Nov '99.

It is a fine narration of contemporary politics of this poor country, a well written summary of what Bangladesh stands for. Unfortunately very few politicians appreciate the point. The author quite rightly pointed out that amateurism occupies the place of profes-

sionalism in our political leadership. It is really disappointing.

The author has skillfully identified what BNP was formulated upon in the '70s: Bangali consciousness with a Muslim identity; citizenship based identity as opposed to lingo-nationalism and secularism. The analysis stresses the point that BNP leadership should concentrate more on the principles they started with rather than pointless hartsals based on the theory that you must keep the pressure on so that AL gets tired and makes mistakes. BNP should also (professionally) tackle 'Blame-the-BNP-First' policy of Sheikh Hasina.

It is true that it was a personal initiative of Hasina that brought her party closer to the centre and to power. However, it was close but not entirely on the 'vital centre'. As a matter of fact, Hasina has moved away from the centre. This happened because of her inclination towards some socialist norms, which she gathered during her upbringing and from the pressure from the old socialist elements in her party. I think Hasina should strictly stick to the changes she brought to AL.

One point the author did not mention is the position of Jatiya Party (Ershad) and Jatiya Party (M-Manji) in the present politics. It has been accepted that JP is an ideological contender of BNP. It has secured 10 per cent seats (directly elected) since 1991 even in adverse political climate. It stayed quiet most of the time but always returned to the political theatre on crucial times. Khaleeda now sees that her being too harsh on Ershad tilted the balance against her in June '96. Hasina, on the other hand,

knows that Manju's maneuvering of the situation at that time changed the course of history. Practically speaking, JP is sitting right in the middle of AL and BNP. Could it be that a combined JP is in the 'vital centre'? If so it explains why BNP is so scared of coming close to JP. JP might appear to be a viable alternative to BNP to the public if they are in close proximity.

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House #17, Road #99  
Gulshan, Dhaka

## Ershad at ZIA

Sir, The knee-jerk action of the authority in snatching away former president Ershad's passport at the airport before a foreign trip may be either due to sudden emergency or it is a tactical act. Why this passenger was not informed earlier that he could not leave the country? This is not the way to treat a former president and an MP.

AZ  
Dhaka

## Land administration

Sir, Thanks to Mr Abdul Kader and Mr Solaiman for writing an appropriate article on our present land administration and management system, published on October 27, 1999 in *The Daily Star*. They have tried to find out the actual problems.

Although Bangladesh is an agrarian country and 80 per cent of its total population are dependent on this sector, the people are not aware about land-laws. So, day after day,

this vast majority of our country are suffering due to land administration complexities.

In the scope of that complexity, a large amount of government owned khas land, khas water bodies etc., are illegally occupied by the so-called powerful persons of the society. Allegedly, a good number of corrupt government officers are also involved in it.

Like many, share croppers are not getting their reasonable share due to lack of proper application of share cropper law.

Many such problems have been discussed in the article. So I would like to request the Land Ministry to take immediate initiative for implementing their mentioned suggestion.

Md Rakibul Hasan  
Pisculture Housing Society  
Shyamoli, Dhaka

## Phone cards for MPs

Sir, We have bank loan defaulters, and we have MPs who are defaulters in the payment of arrears and current telephone bills to the tune of crore of taka (in spite of payment of telephone allowance as perk?).

There might be one solution: fit desktop card telephones at their official addresses, and give them telephone cards for one year up to the limit prescribed. After that they procure new cards privately and make telephone calls to their heart's content reaching the heart of their constituents. There is a proverb: one who pays cash pays least.

A Husnain  
Dhaka