

Bureaucrats dabbling in politics

Put a caveat on the immoral practice

THE reported forays of the country's bureaucrats into politics is disconcerting and deserve to be condemned in the strongest possible terms. This is a cognizable offense under the relevant service rules, yet, some of the bureaucrats have demonstrated a disquieting propensity to care two hoots for the rules by carrying on regardless, and the administration its equal disregard for the very rules it is supposed to uphold by allowing these to go on. This is blatant politicisation of the administration.

What is noticeable in this matter is that, those bureaucrats who in the fog end of their tenure are the ones that are indulging in politics by making use of their position and the weight of their office. The worrisome aspect is the way visits to potential constituencies are being organised under the pretence of official tours - one wrong carried out under another duplicitous act. What is inexcusable is that, these government servants, to establish a future political platform, use not only their own office but also their influence on other colleagues in the administration to invest in their constituencies out of turn. This inevitably results in resources being diverted from priority areas to areas of lesser importance; such acts are culpable offences deserving of severe punishment.

That this has continued in spite of the opposition from members within the ruling alliance exposes the connivance of the ruling party in what can only be termed as illegal as well as immoral activity of some bureaucrats.

However, this is not a recent phenomenon, and we understand that there is a general sense of aversion among the political parties to what some bureaucrats are indulging in to set up political career post retirement. Keeping in mind that a general election is round the corner, we suggest that the political parties come together to enact appropriate laws in the parliament to put a bar, on the civil servants, as well as generals and equivalent in the armed forces participating in politics for a period of at least three years after retirement, or on their participation in the election that will be held immediately after his or her retirement, whichever is longer.

If that is not done, the government offices and public money will continue to be abused and misused, which will not only set bad examples, rewarding these bureaucrats with a nomination or a ministerial post will provide justification for indulging in the immoral and illegal actions in future also.

Sliding law and order

Counter it with effective measures

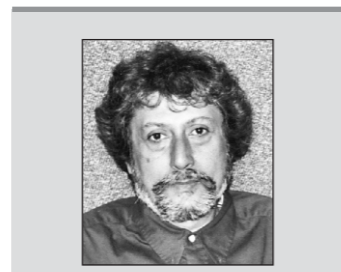
THE slide in law and order is quite manifest, as reports of criminal activities of all kinds are pouring in from all over the country. The number of ghastly crimes committed in the past week shows that the hardened criminals have staged a comeback.

There are two very ominous developments that we have to take note of. First, crimes like murder are being committed to settle even minor disputes. Killing has apparently replaced all other means of arbitration. There has also been a sharp rise in the number of petty crimes. The question that arises is what has emboldened the members of crime syndicates and why the law enforcers fail to make their presence felt. The other development is that the criminals are now targeting even ruling party activists who stand in their way. The murder of a local BNP leader at Tejgaon, who reportedly was leading an anti-crime campaign in his locality, proves the point. The way the crime was committed speaks volumes for the clout, and may be impunity, of the assailants. This kind of gunning down of an elderly man in broad daylight indicates that law and order has again taken a backseat, while killers and goons are enjoying a freehand.

Law and order, or the absence of it, has been a thorny issue ever since the four-party alliance came to power. The government decided to handle the issue the hard way through raising some elite crack forces, though the move drew a lot of flak from human rights advocates. But it is now clear that whatever respite the extreme measures like extra judicial killings brought was temporary. There has been no real change in the ground situation.

The criminals might be taking advantage of the overall chaotic situation prevailing in the country. But then again, it is the duty of the government to make sure that the situation doesn't go out of control. Obviously, citizens must not remain exposed to criminal activities. The law enforcers have to go flat-out to contain the fresh wave of crime.

Voters' list in the museum and



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THE mighty mountain rumbles and grumbles and shakes violently for a long time. Something big is in the deep of its abdomen and struggling to come out soon. Then finally it comes out. What is it? Well, it is a small rat!

You look disappointed? Then consider this. After all the rhetoric and rhapsody and *tarjan* and *garjan* (uproar) about rule of law, transparency, accountability, election *wada* (pledges), image distortion, plastic surgery of distorted image, *unnayaner rajniti* (politics for development), *janagoner kallyan* (people's welfare) and developmental floods, the Chief Selection Commissioner (CSC), at the command of the masters, produces a voters' list that is so flagrantly flawed that it would be

worth keeping it in the museum for the posterity. Maybe a photocopy could be sent to the British Museum for the whole world to see.

There is good side of the story as well. Many scholars consider this the first and best document prepared for engineering an election therefore they are of the opinion that it should be taught as the major subject in the Department of Election Engineering in all the educational institutes.

And it is being discussed that groups of admiring and appreciative citizens have special plaques made for the entire team that spent sleepless nights in preparing this unique document. The gentlemen deserve some recognition for their brilliant work, don't they? Maybe most *deshbashi* (citizens) failed to discern their 'hidden' talent, there are some

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

And out there, corruption is having a field day to flourish and proliferate on the fertile soil of Bangladesh. And it did with amazing speed and continuity! The country's name has been at the top of all in the list of most corrupt countries in the world for four consecutive years! And we mention this in every seminar, every workshop and every round table conference. For many more years we shall keep on saying this to amuse the world.

who did and they do not want to be branded as an ungrateful lot.

Here is another good news for the CSC and his comrades in arm. My overseas source has sent an email urging me to send the message to the CSC that political parties of some foreign countries, particularly in the west, want him to join them to prepare their voters' list and oversee the elections so that their party may have a landslide victory. They have highly appreciated the courage and tenacity of the CSC and his comrades to prevail in the face of High Court ruling, country-wide protests and making a bonfire of their list.

So, looks like good deeds get appreciated by some people somewhere!

Then we have this anti-corruption commission to write home about. This great commission is getting *habuduboo* (drown-

ing) in the wide ocean of corruption knowing not which direction to swim to for the shore. After putting old wine in a new bottle, it began with a small bang, but like many things that begin with a bang and end up in a whimper, also quickly lost steam. In a recent exchange of opinion at its office, the officials concerned expressed their inability to do anything about corruption in the election process! Then what are you there for? In one move the commission is said to have submitted a report to the authorities on a large number of cars gone missing from various developmental projects. But nothing much was heard about the report later.

Understandably, sitting ministers, lying ministers, full-time ministers, part-time ministers, secretaries, joint secretaries, disjointed secretaries, conjoined secretaries, project managers,

project directors, wives of project directors, children of project directors, girlfriends of consultants, servants of consultants who have been using those vehicles could not tolerate the audacity of the old guns managing the anti-corruption commission. The commission has not been created to point fingers at them--the high and mighty-- who run the country! They are unofficially entitled to use those vehicles, to go to bazaars, shopping malls and schools. Mr. Gouri Sen is there with his coffer to buy gas and pay for other costs, so why do you bother? Rather, the commission should go after the meter readers, telephone line men, *darogas* (police officers) and peons who have no right to make money through *dui numberie* (corrupt) means. They must be caught and taken to the gallows!

Well, with so much hullabaloo

going on it is no wonder the commission now resembles a toothless tiger licking its paws in a quiet corner. And out there, corruption is having a field day to flourish and proliferate on the fertile soil of Bangladesh. And it did with amazing speed and continuity! The country's name has been at the top of all in the list of most corrupt countries in the world for four consecutive years! And we mention this in every seminar, every workshop and every round table conference. For many more years we shall keep on saying this to amuse the world.

You see, living in an environment that breeds corruption, we hardly react to news items like bureaucrats violating service rules to join the rat race to get coalition ticket to contest the next general election. It's a free-for-all country, isn't it?

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People's power in Nepal



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

THE Nepalese Foreign Minister described to the diplomatic corps the landmark proclamation by the newly reinstated Parliament sharply reducing the powers of the monarch as an expression of the "sovereignty of the people". The Nepalese proved anew that no longer the divine right of the King to rule, first demolished during the French Revolution, and more recently through people's power in former Czechoslovakia, the Philippines, Georgia and Ukraine, was sacred and that the will of the people was supreme.

The proclamation by the Nepalese Parliament abolished the control of the King over the Royal Nepalese Army, renamed it as the Nepalese National Army, scrapped the position of the King as the Supreme Commander of the army, and that the Cabinet and not the King will henceforth name the Commander-in-Chief of the army. The proclamation abolished the institution of Raj Parishad or the Privy Council which under the old Constitution used to name a successor or a regent to the throne if the reigning monarch died or was incapacitated (henceforth the Parliament and not the King will name the successor and the monarch will have no say relating to royal succession), the government will be known as Nepalese government and not as Royal Nepalese government. The proclamation has put an end to

Nepal being the only Hindu kingdom in the world by embracing secularism as the state principle.

The Parliament declared that the proclamation would not need Royal assent to become law as it was the sovereign decision of the people (there was no dissenting vote against the resolution). The three countries -- India, the US, UK -- and the UN have critical stake in Nepalese situation and have, in varying degrees, the capacity to influence the events in Nepal. The US welcomed the proclamation as a "historic step" and did not think that the army would be politicised because it has been brought under the control of the Parliament but remained wary of the Maoists. The newly appointed Assistant Secretary for South Asian and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher told very recently the US House International Committee that "the Maoists have been an exceptionally brutal insurgency, and their forces have been accustomed to the control over the country side through terror". He demanded of the Maoists to lay down arms, end use of violence and intimidation, and accept the rule of law.

The British welcomed the historic declaration by the Parliament as an expression of people's sovereignty and expressed support for the Constituent Assembly and disarmament to bring the Maoists

within the mainstream of domestic political system. Indian reaction has been through Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's telephonic conversation with G.P.Koirala and invitation to the Nepalese Foreign Minister to visit Delhi. The inopportune support extended by the Indian Special envoy Dr Karan Singh to King Gyanendra's too little too late offer of 21st April was brushed off both by the Nepalese political parties and the people as insufficient and unpopular. The Nepalese people braving the King's shoot-to-kill given to the army encouraged the political parties to stand firm against ill-advised foreign pressure. International Crisis Group suggests to the foreign actors to accept that "Nepal's people are the drivers of international engagements and that in the changed domestic political environment its parties, civil society groups, and other representatives are in a better position than before to make their own suggestions".

Fears have been expressed that euphoria of people's power in the wake of almost total eclipse of monarchical authority could result in "illiberal democracy" in Nepal without constitutional liberalism producing centralised regime, ethnic competition and conflict. Such fears are expressed by those who have achieved, by Francis Fukuyama's measure, level of development, culture and

ideas to sustain democratic process, and historian Bernard Lewis' observation that democracy is a peculiarly Western concept devised to conduct public affairs that may or may not be suitable for other people. Such arrogant elitist views do not take into account that civilised code of conduct should make way for differences in widely divergent societies that are imbued with different, and often, conflicting set of values. Western social permissiveness, for example, could be considered as equivalent to the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah inviting divine wrath. It would, therefore, be difficult to accept Hegelian interpretation of a Constitution as reflective of concentrated wisdom of long historical developments and thereby negating the possibility of borrowing from the experience of others.

In Nepalese case the challenges would mainly focus on the limits of monarchical powers, whether Nepal should have a monarchy at all (the Maoists demand a republic and trial of King Gyanendra), and disarming the Maoists in order to bring them within the fold of democratic process and to bring peace to the country. Brad Adams (of Human Rights Watch) feels that the Constituent Assembly could consider, despite yearning by the civil society groups and the declared intention of the Maoists

to end monarchy, to "emulate Cambodia which stipulated in its 1993 Constitution -- not once, but twice -- that the King reigns but does not rule".

The move to declare Nepal as a secular state is, perhaps, aimed at demolishing the monarch's image as a reincarnation of Hindu God Vishnu believed by many Nepalese in rural areas. The other problem to be solved by the seven-party alliance is the disarming of the Maoists. Already both the government and the Maoists have nominated their respective representatives to the negotiation talks. Maoists' demands remain too radical for conservative Nepal Congress parties to accept. Besides, the Maoists' reported control of 70 per cent of the countryside raises the question whether the Maoists would allow other parties to take up political activities in those areas unless they agree to the proposal of cantonment of their forces along with that of the Nepalese army.

Since human rights violations have been perpetrated both by the Maoists and the Nepalese army can one conceive of a South African style Truth and Reconciliation Commission or trial by an International Tribunal as is proposed for Khmer Rouge? Maoist leader Prachanda's April 27th statement that the ceasefire was intended to facilitate the strug-

gle for a Constituent Assembly and democratic republic "so as to lead the struggle to its historic conclusion" has confused many people. One is not very sure what is meant by "historic conclusion". One saving grace that the Maoists do not have transnational ambition is the Indian official assessment that Nepalese Maoists do not provide significant material assistance to the Indian insurgents.

Though Nepal has yet many miles to traverse before the Maoist rebels and the entrenched monarchists can be brought within the orbit of law, Bangladesh as a neighbour and a member of SAARC would like crisis in Nepal to end quickly.

One cannot, however, be oblivious of the irony that while the sagacity and wisdom of another King forced an errant Prime Minister to resign though his party secured more than fifty percent of the votes cast in a disputed general election, induced the country's Constitutional Court to annul the election and call for the resignation of the Election Commission as it lacked the confidence of all the political parties, neighbouring countries' rulers like the King of Nepal and Bangladesh authorities refuse to take lesson from the wisdom cited above. After all, the country is always more important than those who rule that country at any given moment of time.

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OPINION

When zero credibility is preferred to risky victory

AR SHAMSUL ISLAM

OVER quite some time past, the US, EU, other donor countries have repeatedly stressed upon the importance of the upcoming national polls of 2007.

The leader of the ruling 4-party alliance, the BNP has, as well, not lagged behind to pinpoint, in public and private meetings, the far-reaching consequences of the approaching parliamentary elections on the destiny of the nation.

Understandably, the opposition has viewed the polls as one involved with its life and death question.

The outside powers, that is our donor countries, have so much valued the polls for the sake of saving the fledgling democracy of Bangladesh.

On the other hand the BNP has weighed the elections in the interest of retaining power at all costs with the motive of perpetuating it.

Whereas foreign dignitaries have repeatedly emphasised upon 'a level playing field' to make the coming polls of 2007 credible to the international community, the BNP leadership seems to have already built up a massive network to hijack election results. Some of its manipulations

are outlined below:

a) The government has raised the retiring age of the higher judiciary to get its own man, the last retired Chief Justice K M Hasan, as the Chief of the caretaker government (CTG). Incidentally, Justice Hasan served as an ambassador during Ziaur Rahman's rule. He was a member of the Advisory Council of the BNP.

b) Justice MA Aziz was appointed the Chief of the Election Commission. By now he has provided plenty of partisanship in initial election works. Though, ultimately his achievement stands nullified by the court.

c) The nullified draft voter list has shown the total number of electorates for the upcoming polls at 09.13 crore which figure borders on arithmetical absurdity. Mentionably, earlier the High Court ordered for updating the voter list. But the Chief Election Commissioner defied it at ease.

d) For the first time in the history of election in Bangladesh Upazilla Election Officers were appointed. Incidentally a large number of them happened to be from the old Chhatra Dal cadres.

e) As coming from the print media, Election Officers with strong BNP link

are being sent to join important Election Offices in the metropolises.

f) The vital institutions of administration, police, lower judiciary etc. have already been grossly politicised.

g) The BNP is learnt to have pooled a staggering election budget running into several thousand crore taka.

h) The President of the Republic is partisan. Though rendered powerless in normal time, he is elevated to be the most powerful functionary even controlling and commanding the army during the caretaker government.

In fact the above measures as taken by the alliance government led by the BNP are too exposed and excessive to admit the main opposition combine led by the AL, which is also no less itchy to go to power, to participate in the forthcoming polls. To offset this machination the 14-party opposition alliance has been demanding for the last few months for a charter of reforms in the CTG and EC. Till now the government has responded negatively terming it as unnecessary and a conspiracy of the main opposition AL to create chaos and confusion in the society. The main opposition has threatened that

it would not participate in the government engineered polls. Nor it would allow such designed election to be held.

The US, UK, other donor countries have repeatedly sermonised, with some degree of seriousness, that both the government and opposition should sit together and settle their scores through dialogues. Thereupon the BNP leadership has some times uttered its willingness to participate in dialogues with the opposition. But it seems more of a lip exercise.

What may come off in days to come? The alliance government may pass out the rest five months of its tenure practising wiles and guiles. The incoming CTG may have no option than holding parliamentary polls according to existing rules of the constitution. It is not fancied that the main opposition headed by the AL will join the polls to sound its death knell.

The alliance led by the BNP may come out victorious in the polls like a walkover taker. Its credibility, at home and abroad, will be a big zero. It may encounter miseries to be pulled down under the weight of no acceptability.

Is it that the BNP leadership is bereft of the minimum wisdom that a government cannot be run with a

zero credibility on its scoresheet? Particularly the BNP has in its memory afresh the infamous February election of 1991. Then why does it tend to repeat another such fiasco?

Probably because the BNP leadership has been able to sense that if a somewhat unbiased election is held its (BNP's) victory may prove to be risky. Some of the grave symptoms are:

a) By now the people are convinced that most of the legislators of the BNP are financially corrupt.

b) They have alienated themselves from the party grassroots level activists of their own constituencies.

c) The BNP-led government has grossly mismanaged, particularly towards the end of its present tenure, some of the vital sectors of the administration depriving the people of basic amenities of life like water, gas, electricity, fertiliser etc.

d) The government failed miserably to contain the skyrocketing prices of essential items believed to be resulting from the manipulation of syndicates alleged to be manned by BNP High-ups.

e) In some cases like when local people resented demanding electricity at Kamsat, water at Sanir Akhra, BNP leaders woefully failed to meet

the situation patiently and maturely aggravating the condition causing damage, destruction of property and loss of lives of the people in police excesses.

f) When it was time for the government to deal with issues involved with people's interests, the government agencies concerned ignored it without realising that it might develop into a time bomb.

g) The government gave indulgence to, if not patronising, the rise and growth of religious militancy until it became too strong and widespread.

h) Almost hundred percent people are against religious militancy.

i) The government must be given full credit for apprehending the top militant leaders Shaekh Abdur Rahman, Siddikul Islam 'Bangla Bhai' etc. But why their godfathers are being spared whose identity is perhaps known to everybody is a question raised even by the top dignitaries of the donor countries based in Bangladesh.

j) There are plenty of serious factional feuds at the grassroots level of the BNP.

k) The BNP is sometimes severely jolted by rebel voices of higher rung like MP Abu Hena of

Rajshahi, MP Col (retd) Oli Ahmed of Chittagong etc.

l) Feuds between the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami over seeking nomination for the next parliamentary polls are sometimes seen raging in the public.

m) The citadel of administration, the Secretariat, may explode as the maliciously ill-treated, promotion-benefit-deprived officers and employees are learnt to be trying to regroup themselves.

n) The government has image crisis internationally.

o) The government suffers from an identity crisis. Mention-ably, Bangladesh cherishing the ideals of democracy, nationalism, secularism, social justice was born of a bloody war in 1971. The alliance government stands for a religion-based moderate Muslim state. How can these two be reconciled?

In fact, the BNP leadership is in a dilemma to choose between two miseries -- a) earn a walkover victory with zero credibility and b) participate in fairly fair election battles where scoring victory is risky. The BNP leadership seems to be tilting towards the first option in the light that defeat means outright departure from power whereas a walkover victory,

though with nil credibility, will give the party a space to breathe and invent design and strategies as to how it (BNP) can hold on to power to the exclusion of political enemy, the AL.

BNP may dodge past the remaining five months of its tenure denying the main opposition demand for electoral reforms. Nevertheless, there is a reserve rule of the game. And where the game is parliamentary polls and the field is the whole terrain encompassing Bangladesh the top committee is constituted by the people fully empowered to decide.

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