Good governance: Does it start midway?

From the foregoing analysis it can be suggested that in a country with top-down administration, g-gov has to start at the top. The leaders have to rise above partisan interest and have a national vision such that the fruits of development spill over to the common citizens and not just to a particular group or groups.

MD. GHULAM MURTAZA

T is an undeniable fact that in recent times the uproar for good governance has approached unprecedented proportions in Bangladesh. The spate of articles and comments in the street agitations and demonstrations by political parties and civil society organisations for good governance amply demonstrate the importance being attached to

Growing concerns that the effectiveness of Bangladesh's development efforts could be undermined by governance shortcomings have reached such an extent that it has made the donor agencies hint at improvements in governance benchmarks as a condition for further access to development credits. The above scenario may naturally lead the common man to conclude that we are going downhill, and that there can be no reprieve in the near

Such conclusions, however, blur the achievements of-development efforts in Bangladesh. According to a major donor agency involved with the development of the country since its inception, Bangladesh has recorded impressive economic and social gains in the past decade.

The country has doubled per capita income and taken strides towards reaching many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Gender parity in school enrolment, at both primary and secondary level, has been achieved, child mortality has been system are some examples.

halved, and life expectancy has increased significantly since the

What has not happened is that the benefits of development have not trickled down to the grassroots levels sufficiently enough to be called "people's participation," democratic options are evaporating fast, and the rule of law is observed more in its violation. Hence the cry for good governance.

Elements of good

governance What do we mean by good governance (g-gov from now)? In a general sense, g-gov is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for overall development. This implies sound economic management based on: (i) accountability; (ii) participation; (iii) predictability; and (iv) transparency. Protection of human rights, application of democratic options, the rule of law, and

promotion of independent media

are also elements of g-gov. Efforts at improving governance

The government is not unaware of the need for g-gov. Succeeding political governments in the counry have, time and again, taken shots at g-gov by means of initiating reforms through donorassisted projects in different sectors. Financial sector reform project, public administration reform project and dialogue with donors on the need for reducing unacceptably high system loss and ineffi cient distribution in the power

ecomes the order of the day. Viewed from "the reverse angle"

chy of officers to be implemented

Under such an environment, g-

gov would mean that executive

decisions at the Secretary level of a

Ministry, taken in national interest,

are allowed to go down to the lower

ranks, unhindered, for implemen-

tation. The problem arises when

there is political intervention at the

top as well as mid-secretarial level

by "higher authorities," especially

those with greater political influ-ence, to alter decisions to suit

In such situations, the bureau-

crats perform their duties pas-

sively; consequentially inefficiency

and poor governance creeps in and

permeates throughout the rank

and file of the ministry. The end

result is disillusionment and con-

fusion, which in turn breed further

inefficiency. Piecemeal efforts at g-

gov by dynamic officers at different

levels, are too little, or come too

What is the rationale behind inter-

ventions? Like most countries of

South Asia, Bangladesh is experi-

encing accelerated population

growth, particularly, urban growth

crisis due to which demand for

jobs, housing, medicare and other

necessities surpasses the facilities

late, to change the scenario.

Political intervention

at the bottom rank.

group interests.

(a popular World Cup term), the doling out of such facilities becomes a ploy for obtaining polit-Who governs: Bureaucracy ical support, and the rule of law or parliament? becomes translated into the rule of Governance in Bangladesh is tied the high and mighty. Lack of transdown to the bureaucracy because it parency and accountability is a is, by and large, the executive arm shield for partisan activities. And of the government. In our country, when another political party as in other Asian countries forcomes to power the rigmarole merly under colonial rule, admincontinues; only the players change. istration is top-down and decisions are carried out through an hierar-

ing at the end of a job line has slim

chance of getting a job; thus using

political intervention to get it

Where does g-gov start? From the foregoing analysis it can be suggested that in a country with top-down administration, g-gov has to start at the top. The leaders have to rise above partisan interest and have a national vision such that the fruits of development spill over to the common citizens and not just to a particular group or groups. The voice of the common man -- through their representatives in the local government, the parliament or through civil society organisations -- has to make its mark in policy-making.

This means that there has to be grassroots participation in the decision-making process. The front-page interviews published frequently in the local dailies in Bangladesh and chat-forums on television of cross-sections of intelligentsia on national issues and their solutions -- a healthy forum for peoples' participation -should be listened to by the policy-

The practice of awarding public works and procurement contracts purely on merit basis has to be encouraged. The understanding by the bidders of a contract that they will get the job if they are worthy, whether they are in the ruling party or in the opposition, will lessen the bickering for political power and the resultant agitations. Sound

procurement policies will also save the country the hundreds of crores of Taka lost to inefficient manage

Parliamentary supervision in Bangladesh is obstructed by the lack of facilities for the MPs to review and discuss policy issues and options in a rational manner instead of in an environment of political polarisation. Each Member of Parliament should be given office space, a computer, a personal staff and a small fund for research and analysis on issues being discussed in the House.

Heads of some important parliamentary committees like Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and Public Undertaking Committee (PUC) may be rotated between ruling and opposition party lawmakers. A "Minister's Hour" may be introduced on television for a minister to answer questions concerning his ministry. Goodwill delegations of MPs may be sent occasionally to attend parliamentary sessions of developed countries as a learning process. The parliamentary committee on public accounts may insist for audit of public accounts at the end of each financial year.

And finally, the members of the ruling party may give a more patient hearing to the opposition in the parliamentary debates, learning from their own experiences while in opposition. Likewise, the opposition should not oppose for opposition's sake only but speak out when national interest is hampered. A strong national economy will come to the advantage of the next government when they come to power, whereas their task at nation building will become more difficult if they inherit a weak economy. This way, the beginning of a journey towards sustainable good governance may hopefully be made.

Md. Ghulam Murtaza is General Manager, Research Department, Bangladesh Bank,

IN MEMORIAM

Barrister Shawkat Ali Khan

ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

HE high pitched laughter will not be heard any more. My wonderful friend Barrister Shawkat Ali Khan has said good bye to this world.

My friendship with Shawkat dates back to the early seventies and has endured the test of time. He was a wonderful, warm host, full of friendly welcome in his very interesting old Dhaka home, which belonged to his father-in-law Mr.RP Shaha.

Mr. Shaha was killed by the Pakistan occupation army along with his only son in 1971. The tradition of hospitality in the home started by Mr. Shaha was maintained by Shawkat in his inimitable manner during Eid and New Year. There used to be annual Durga Puja in Mirzapur, which was attended by thousands of guests. Shawkat continued to be the affable host.

Shawkat's friendship ran through my family. He was a very close friend of my cousin Mokhlesur Rahman, who recently passed away and we had to hide the news from him because his daughter Ranju felt that the shock would be too much for him. The two of them were tied with unbreakable bond of friendship. Shawkat would always ask me news of his friend Moko, who lived in the Isle of Wight in England since the early seventies. I was the link man between the

My younger brother Dr. Ashrafuz Zaman recounts Shawkat's hospitality when during his student days in Paris he had gone to London, where Shawkat was studying to become a barrister. My voters and never took anything in

brother had an accidental meeting return. Indeed during his long with Shawkat, who took him to his flat and kept him and cooked for plished cook and gourmet.

On my return to Bangladesh in 1985 after working as Acting Secretary General of the OIC in Jeddah, I joined Sheikh Hasina as her adviser. I found Shawkat a dedicated worker for the Awami League. I learnt that he had been presented to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and remained a dedicated worker for the Awami League till his death.

He was a politician and worked tirelessly in his constituency near Mirzapur and was elected Member of Parliament. He worked for the betterment of the lot of his village career with the Awami League, he occupied no post from Bangabandhu, and upon my suggestion Sheikh Hasina made him the treasurer of the party.

It was common sight when Shawkat would lead Awami League processions through the streets of Dhaka. Barrister Shawkat Ali Khan is the most incorruptible political leader that I have known.

I cannot end my brief tribute without a word on the wonderful loving relationship between Shawkat and his wife Bijoya. They were an example for couples to follow. Bijoya is ailing in Mirzapore. I pray for her rapid recovery

Arshad-uz Zaman is a former Ambassador and

RMG buyers are migratory birds

Even now Bangladesh receives orders, as labour costs are still cheaper in Bangladesh compared to that of our competitors. Unfortunately, other than this factor, we don't have any other advantage that can help to persuade more buyers to place their orders in Bangladesh. Besides, issues such as port problems, and political instability are also factors that make Bangladesh less attractive to buyers. The moment the buyers find that Bangladesh's labour costs are no longer cheap, they will fly away.

M ZAHEDUL ANWAR

HE ready-made garments manufacturing (RMG) business started in this country back in the late seventies. With the help of the Late Mr. Nurul Kader, Bangladesh's RMG sector embassy officials do anything? was able to flourish in those early Once again, the answer is no. Here, remains as a variable. years by going into a joint venture with South Korea. Mr. Kader trained a good number of people. who have now turned into very successful entrepreneurs or owners of RMG factories.

Although Bangladesh's RMG sector has achieved its present prominent position after many decades, there is still much to be unsure of. Throughout the sector's gradual advancement there have been two main contributors -- the owners, or entrepreneurs, and the workers, especially women workers. Others may have a different opinion, but it is clear that these two parties are surely the major contributors to the industry.

Like in other countries, the government should always be a catalyst. But I feel, as a person involved in this sector, that the government of Bangladesh does not make much of a contribution. On the other hand, due to employment generation and foreign exchange earnings, the government comes across as the main beneficiary, whether the RMG

sector makes any profit or not. You may not agree with me, but let me give you an example to support my view: as you all know, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has set up an export target for each

whether or not one has achieved provide proper materials. All of the the target. But what have they done to achieve the target? The answer is orders and shipped the targeted amount. But did any of the one can see that it is clearly all in the effort of the owners and work-

Since the beginning, buyers have been placing their orders in Bangladesh primarily because of the price. From our point of view we are only concerned about the FOB price, but for the buyer it is the landed price of the garment, which includes -- FOB price, freight charges, duty and tax, clearing and brokerage, and transportation. Out of all these concerns, two main concerns are FOB price and duty and tax. As a manufacturing country we are only responsible for the FOB price and this FOB price consists of material cost and cost of making, known as the CM.

In most cases, factories do not have any control over the materials, as the buyer or buyer's representatives decide for how much and from where to buy materials. On the other hand, the factories bear the expenses such as salary and wages, rent and electricity, clearing and forwarding charges, banking expenses, and transportations. It is only after covering all these expenses that the

owner can get any profit. Let us concentrate on the FOB price. Please note that there are only a very few internationally embassy, where they publish recognised countries that can

competing countries can buy from these specific countries at a similar have to pay a little bit more to cover their cost of funds. Thus, the main

Now, if we go deeper into the issue, the major portion of the CM is the salary and wages, but more specifically, the wages are the main factor which determine the CM of a garment factory. But there are other factors which vary from factory-to-factory, and buyer-tobuyer, depending on the quantity, quality requirement, delivery time, buyers' reputation, factory's goodwill, and so on. In Bangladesh, we can offer better CM as we have cheap labour, which covers the major portion of the CM.

The CM factor is the main determinant for which buyers place orders to Bangladesh rather than other countries such as China, India, Pakistan, Turkey, and North American countries. If you go back in history you will find that buyers have been changing their sourcing countries due to labour costs.

Before the Second World War, or immediately after, it was Britain, US, and the European countries that used to produce ready-made garments. Afterwards, it was South Korea, Taiwan, and the North American countries. Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand were soon to join, followed by China, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. These buyers are like birds migrating from country to country and

Even now Bangladesh receives orders, as labour costs are still cheaper in Bangladesh compared to that of our competitors. Unfortunately, other than this factor, we don't have any other advantage that can help to persuade more buyers to place their orders in Bangladesh. Besides, ssues such as port problems, and political instability are also factors that make Bangladesh less attractive to buyers. The moment the buyers find that Bangladesh's labour costs are no longer cheap, they will fly away.

Now, it is our responsibility to stay competitive. Problems concerning the RMG sector need to be removed or else we will lose our buyers. These concerns are -- banking expenses, clearing and forwarding charges, lengthy time consumption in port and customs, expenses against services, and transportation

Recently, a riot broke out in this sector, and now, the CM rates will increase for various reasons such as increment of wages, new requirements to look after workers' grievances, increased number of security personnel, and increase in insurance premium. Ultimately when things will cross the optimum level, we will start to lose our customers to other countries and regions.

Very soon we will see that the situation will get worse, unless the owners, workers, BGMEA/BKMEA and government immediately take care of these issues. In the recently held round table discussions concerning the unrest in the RMG sector, it has been decided that there will be an increase of salaries, and more facilities will be provided for the workers. The workers will also be given the right to form trade unions. But I am not sure whether or not they have ever checked how feasible things are in this county where trade unions never result in anything good, but rather in

M Zahedul Anwar is CEO, Mark International, a

Presidency: Endless smokescreen

There is serious apprehension that the coalition government wants to change the president and install someone more loyal. The government is already in a spot of bother because of the obstinate and wayward Chief Election Commissioner MA Aziz. He has already earned a lot of infamy and is being regarded as sort of a conspirator to foil, or at least endanger, the next general elections. If the government ultimately goes for removing President lajuddin Ahmed, the situation will definitely be all the more precarious.

KAZI S M KHASRUL ALAM QUDDUSI

N the just concluded budget session of the parliament, the sition leaders exchanged rather humorous remarks regarding our presidency. The prime minister in her speech made it known that she has no desire to become the president. But does this clear up the smokescreen that has been created by the two-president phenomenon? As things stand now, it would hardly be an overstatement if it is said that the presidency issue has now become a matter that is responsible for spawning an immeasurable amount of

In fact, people of almost all walks of life are now anything but certain regarding the present state of affairs. People are also equally worried about the fate of the current ailing president. Even the diehard supporters of the current government will recognise the fact that the government is largely responsible for the uncalled-for smokescreen that has resulted from the government's hide and seek game regarding President Iajuddin Ahmed and Acting (temporary!) President Jamiruddin

The coalition government

seems to be playing a funny game. flag and insignia? Many constitu-President), the Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed calls him the Bharprapto Rastoprati (President-in-Charge?). Can't they even be at one as to the nomenclature of the two presidents or is it another funny game?

Yes, Article 54 of our constitution clearly spells out the provision for conducting the affairs of the Presidency, temporarily, until the president has recuperated or a new president is elected. The article says: "If a vacancy occurs in the office of President or if the President is unable to discharge the functions of his office on account of absence, illness or any other cause the Speaker shall discharge his functions until a President is elected or until the President resumes the functions of his office, as the case may be."

But the government's flippancy regarding the protocol and status of Professor Iajuddin Ahmed must have raised many eyebrows. Where in the constitution is it mentioned that the president would have to be stripped of his ple. To be frank, the president's

There is disagreement in it even in tion experts have called it unconterms of the naming of the two stitutional. In fact, it is humiliating Presidents. While the fora President whether it is consti-Bangabhavan terms the makeshift tutional or not. Things are all the prime minister and the oppopresident Jamiruddin Sircar as the more disconcerting because of the Astahyee Rastoprati (Acting fact that this very government sacked another president. The government might have had reasons to sack him but the mode of his sacking was not at all a pleas-The sacking of Badruddoza

Chowdhury invited all sorts of criticism as well. In the previous Awami League regime there were reports of strained relations between the then President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed and the Awami League government. Some in Awami League were reported to have made adverse comments regarding Shahabuddin Ahmed. But did Awami League sack Shahabuddin Ahmed? The current coalition government should have kept that in mind because the current smokescreen may have been further reinforced due to the Badruddoza case.

President Iajuddin Ahmed's illness may be a natural case, but the very handling of the issue by the government has given rise to doubts in the minds of the opposition parties and the general peo-

return from Bangkok and his going to CMH instead of Bangabhavan and the withdrawal of his flag and insignia must have compounded the doubts that the government has a different plan regarding lajuddin Ahmed. I fail to understand why the government is providing so much space for

Meanwhile, many belonging to the civil society have requested President Iajuddin Ahmed not to relinquish the presidency. Some have also requested the government not to fire President Iajuddin Ahmed. All these boil down to the fact that the conscious people of the country are very worried about all the happenings centring on the presidency. This concern is because of the fact that the president of Bangladesh -- though a figurehead in an elected government's tenure -- has a significant role to play during the caretaker regime. As the president is in charge of the armed forces as well, his role is all the more crucial in a caretaker regime.

Meanwhile, there is serious apprehension that the coalition government wants to change the president and install someone more loyal. The government is already in a spot of bother because of the obstinate and wayward Chief Election Commissioner MA Aziz. He has already earned a lot of infamy and is being regarded as sort of a conspirator to foil, or at least endanger, the next general elections. If the government ultimately goes for removing President Iajuddin Ahmed, the situation will definitely be all the more precarious.

Kazi S M Khasrul Alam Quddusi is Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration,

Islamophobia: Who is to blame for bad image?

O create the impression of being a Muslim, an older man driving a Toyota Kijang puts his prayer rug on the dashboard and hangs a string of prayer beads inside the windshield. The long-bearded man already wears a cap and Arab-style shirt, but he seems to lack the feeling of being a "true" Muslim. So he puts the words "Muslim car" on the rear

The question arises: Is this a Muslim car? Of course, the answer is no, because Indonesia's favorite Toyota Kijang is a product of Japan, which obviously is not a Muslim country. His behaviour provokes comment. Some say, "He's trying to be a good Muslim but he looks free to do what he wants as long as

he doesn't bother anyone." Actually, the man does not mean to create an odd impression, but he is confusing Arabic culture with Islamic teachings. Thus the long beard and Arabic shirt, which create a strange and misleading image for some in the Muslim community. He is trapped in symbolic language and cannot distinguish between making himself Arabic and developing his own Islamic qualities rooted in Indonesian culture. He thinks he follows the Prophet's words, while some opponents of Prophet Muhammad, such as Abu Lahab,

also had a long beard. Various opinions regarding

MOHAMMAD YAZID, The Jakarta Post strange." Others maintain, "He's in line with the diverse views of Islamic groups. The Islamic image is certainly inseparable from influential Muslim figures such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, who has been branded a radical, Habib Rizieq with his Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Abdurrahman Wahid with his Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) base, and Amien Rais with Muhammadiyah. The other models are reflected in such parties as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), the Crescent Star Party (PBB) and the United Development Party

Even many long-standing Muslims become confused by this complex array of choices, let alone those who have just become acquainted with Islam. There are Islam in Indonesia have emerged also groups that actively spread

their beliefs but often spark conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims as they mix group interests with personal stakes.

The different standpoints of these groups are legitimate. They become a problem when the groups bind themselves rigidly to their beliefs. This attitude eventually makes them exclusive and intolerant. They become closed to other truths that can be found in other parts of the world or in non-Muslim communities: This narrowness contradicts the abundant universal values of Islam.

They ensnare themselves in self-justification by choosing Koran verses that support their point of view. In high spirits they claim to be defenders of Islam while they are actually destroying the image of Islam. The rest of the Muslim world, let alone non-Muslims, are angered by their anarchistic acts, such as suicide attacks under some misinterpreted notion of jihad or holy war.

"We are enjoying a communal victory, but we experience a doctrinal failure," the late Muslim intellectual Nurcholis Madjid is quoted by Sukidi in the book Teologi Inklusif Cak Nur (Nurcholis's, Inclusive Theology). According to him, we succeed and win in communal terms but we lose in doctrinal terms. Some of religion's great ideals are not turned

into reality. Several world incidents linked with Islam have occurred, such as the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the 2002 and 2005 Bali

bombings, the 2004 blast in Kuningan, South Jakarta, and several church bombings at Christmastime, all claiming numerous lives. Naturally the cumulative effect of these occurrences is to create a bad image of Muslims among non-Muslims.

Muslims will find it wiser to respond to this negative impression by looking within themselves. Islam's peace-loving stance should come to the fore, rather than the urge to defend these attacks with long explanations. An honest attitude will offset all

these misunderstandings. There is no need to be ashamed of acknowledging that amid the waves of globalization, Muslims have fallen far behind in promoting the modern ethical values long practiced by , edge Indonesia's pluralist society

non-Muslims. These values and declare "war" on terror and include democracy and the ethos of diligence and discipline, all of which improve human existence.

The time has come for the Muslim community in Indonesia to reflect on the fact that as the majority of the population they actually have no role to play in politics. On the contrary, they have become "easy prey" for a number of political parties in every general

The bad image of Muslims is understandable, but it can be avoided if they show tolerance on the basis of strong fraternity. Non-Muslims should be aware that they are not the only victims of terror: Muslims themselves are its victims too. All elements need to acknowl-

Non-Muslims would also be wise to avoid being trapped by the kind of unreasonable fear associated with ghosts and haunted places. If they fail to face this challenge, the words of Nur Hidayat Wahid, Speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly, will prove true: that Islam-phobia is now emerging, under the exact meaning of the word "phobia" in Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary: "inexplicable and illogical fear"

Mohammad Yazid is a staff member on The Jakarta Post's Opinion Desk

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