

A Missed Opportunity

Yet another death anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has come and gone, leaving our people — or most of them — not much wiser about the implications of one of the tragic events of our history.

It is a pity. It could have been, indeed, different this year. With the return of democracy in the country and a slow but steady change in our political climate, the people seemed able to look at their history with a new sense of responsibility that comes with freedom from autocracy. At the same time — so we thought — major political parties, holding divergent views on the life and times of Bangabandhu, would reach out to one another to find a common ground in their understanding of the man whose contribution to the emergence of Bangladesh is second to none. It is through such an understanding that we would have eventually developed a broad national approach to our history and a non-partisan attitude towards our national heroes.

It is hard to say where exactly we failed in the way we observed the anniversary yesterday. But we failed. Was it an error of judgement on the part of the government of Begum Khaleda Zia that it could not turn the occasion into a national one and, in the process, strengthen its own base among sections of people who may not necessarily belong to BNP? Sadly, we would answer the question in the affirmative. But was there also a lapse on the part of Awami League that it could not discard its partisan angle in honouring a man who is more a national figure than a political asset for any particular political party? Here, too, our answer remains in the affirmative.

With these lapses, it was hardly surprising that the observance of the anniversary yesterday was marred by lavish eulogies as much as by inflammatory denunciations, with a handful of discredited politicians seeking their own rehabilitation through the media.

Like all controversial political personalities, Sheikh Sahib evoked — and, now a historical figure, continues to evoke — strong emotions of almost opposite extremes among all sections of people. This is precisely what makes a dispassionate evaluation of Bangabandhu all the more important. Such an evaluation should take into account not only his enormous contribution to our national emergence and to the liberation of Bangladesh but also his political blunders and failures which cost the nation so heavily. But, then, would such an evaluation be complete without detailed references to and condemnation of the tragic circumstances surrounding his killing and those of his closest family members?

We need this evaluation for our coming generations who should have as dispassionate a history as possible, no matter how ugly and unpleasant it may be in parts. But we also need this as a framework for our evaluation of other national figures of Bangladesh. It won't be long before we observe other anniversaries and national days. Such occasions should not be allowed to generate divisive sentiments.

Indeed, such divisive sentiments — and the forces behind them — continue to be at work, ready to exploit every opportunity to weaken the prospects of national consensus on major issues. At this moment, one such issue is the Indemnity (Repeal) Bill. By now, it is clear that a cross section of leading politicians are agreed that the bill should go through without any hitch. This should indeed be so. However, it is important that the two major parties — BNP and AL — reach an understanding not only on the passage of the bill but also on its aftermath. A step towards reaching such an understanding could have been taken yesterday. But it wasn't — a case of missed opportunity.

Welcome Incursion

The leadership of the world's nations has in the modern times been made the poorer by the fact that it was constituted almost exclusively of people excelling in politicking — and politicking alone. Very few people proficient in other very important areas of human activity came up to lead a nation and add something new to the way nations are built and directed and administered. The philosopher king of Plato was as chimerical as a poetess society was an impossibility, however much Plato had pleaded for it. Wise and knowledgeable men from the sciences and arts, particularly practising arts, very rarely could enrich the science and art of statecraft. And, strangely enough that held true even in the post-Marxian era distinguished by the rise of the socialist state and the decline of the colonial world. Every Marxist political activist was supposed to be an intellectual of some standing — and communists deliberately inflated this notion by making much of a pontificating Stalin or Mao or a poetic Ho. Even in such a socialistic scheme of political setting, knowledge and culture took a back seat — in spite of the legacy of Lenin who, besides himself being a giant of an intellectual of very profound import and prolific output, had Lunacharsky by him to say the final word on culture and the arts — and very importantly on education. There was of course a small but very honourable exception to this in the development of socialist Marxists in Latin America where the rise of Pablo Neruda and Diego Rivera was possible because of artists and poets, writers and intellectual workers of all kind were taken as being an integral part of the political 'vanguard'.

Winston Churchill was an exception that proved the rule. He wrote into winning a Nobel Prize and painted canvases that fetched good money on pure merit.

A more genuine exception was Paderewski, the foremost pianist of his time who became the head of the government of Poland at a particularly critical phase of the nation's history.

But these were events belonging to generations afar. News came on Wednesday that a radio joker has become the Prime Minister of Iceland. David Oddsson, perhaps no pun is involved, the new leader at Reykjavik however says that he hasn't been a jester for the past twenty years. But his popularity as such seems to persist — and during these twenty years he occupied an eminent position as a political satirist.

We like it Mr Oddsson. And we would like many more of such colourful and eminent people from fields far removed from politics to come and join the governmental circus if only to enrich politics and governance. Malraux do indeed elevate politics rather than degrading themselves as creative intellectuals.

The Scoop that Put De Klerk on a Slippery Slope

John Periman writes from Johannesburg

The whole South African political situation has been transformed by a newspaper scoop. Revelations that, as long suspected, covert government aid had been going to Chief Buthelezi's Inkatha Movement to counter the African National Congress have shaken the de Klerk government to its foundations. The high moral ground it suddenly started to occupy less than two years ago has turned into a slippery slope with unpredictable long-term consequences.

and said that he had not expected it.

These disclosures have stirred the South African political pot in a way not seen since the unbanning of the ANC and other organisations, and the release of Mandela last February.

And in the tradition of all

great newspaper scoops, the handful of journalists involved made sure secrecy began at home. Even those working a few desks away from the investigating team had little idea of what was up — and still have no idea as to where the 'Deep Throats' came from.

That helped to ensure that

there was more to come a week later. And when it did, distribution of the paper with its disclosures was sabotaged in various ways.

Distribution agents, for instance, were phoned by persons unknown and told that there would be no edition of the Weekly Mail that week.

One disclosure leads to another, and in this case the process has been speeded by government willingness to keep shooting at its own foot. Law and Order Minister Adrian Vlok, for instance, was under vigorous questioning by Weekly Mail editor Anton Harber on national television. Suddenly, he voluntarily disclosed that the police had given R1.5 million to the United Workers' Union of South Africa (UWUSA), Inkatha's trade union wing.

Similarly, Foreign Minister P. W. Botha disclosed a few days later that the South African government had given some R100 million to various political parties to oppose the South West African Peoples' Organisation (SWAPO) in the Namibian elections.

Each disclosure has prompted further inquiry and Vlok, in particular, has been caught out yet again. In the same television debate with Harber, he insisted that there had been no abuse of taxpayers' money. He said: 'Each and every cent has been documented.'

Five days later, the Weekly Mail and The Guardian published documents which revealed that the police were so

concerned that UWUSA were not spending the money properly that they had set up a commission of inquiry to investigate the possible misuse of funds. It revealed that UWUSA had not bothered to keep accounts.

The Weekly Mail also documented several incidents in which court orders had been granted against UWUSA members restraining them from attacking members of other unions — some of the incidents led to deaths — and contended that UWUSA had not really been involved in organising workers at all.

As far as State president F. W. de Klerk is concerned, he is discovering that the moral high ground can be slippery. De Klerk and his government have enjoyed an almost unbroken rise in credibility both domestically and abroad since his path-breaking steps last February.

His government is embarrassed and that is shared by foreign supporters like US state department official Herman Cohen, who just days before the disclosures declared there was no evidence of police partiality in the conflict between South African political organisations.

De Klerk's government has been shown to be partisan, and pressure will now increase for some kind of interim government to take over the transition.

The funding disclosures also provide the glue for other allegations to stick a little more. The most important is

the claim that the police have assisted — and at best ignored — Inkatha's actions during township violence.

Although the funding was not necessarily used to those ends, the link between Inkatha and the security forces has been proved.

Inkatha and Buthelezi in particular had been striding the political stage with ever-increasing confidence. In South Africa and abroad, Buthelezi's stature was such that any talk of negotiations mentioned him in the same breath as Mandela and De Klerk.

Now his political empire is starting to look shabby. Secret funds, feeble denials, misuse of taxpayers' money — that combined with black South Africans' horror at complicity with the state is a taint that even the strongest politician will struggle to shake off.

In the longer term, two important issues are emerging. The first is that while there is wide-spread delight that the truth is emerging, there is going to be life after Inkathagate.

Buthelezi may be cowed by these disclosures but he will not be buried. And in the long run talks for a political settlement are faced with the same tasks and pitfalls. The Inkatha-ANC conflict still has the potential to unleash horrible violence.

The second important consequence of Inkathagate is the boost it has given to the press and not just in terms of sales. South Africans are now used to seeing cabinet ministers getting the grilling that Harber gave Vlok on national television. Hopefully it will whet their appetite for more.

The public is lapping it up. In a country where freedom of the press is by no means guaranteed — no matter who the future government — the value of this cannot be underestimated. — GEMINI NEWS



ONE of the principal goals of a modern development-oriented government is development itself. It is the constitutional and ethical obligation of a government to meet the basic needs of the people and to deliver the fruits of development to them. The concept of development however varies from country to country, from people to people because of the diversity of geographical, political, and socio-economic features. The goals of development are based upon the value system developed and needs felt or perceived by the people.

Development like love and leadership is not a concept but a construct. It is a construct because drawing a boundary line of development is difficult. The definition of development is always tentative, situational, and contextual; it is never static, final and complete. With the rise in the level of the people's consciousness and fast changing technology, needs of the people have become diverse and multiple. Politics of modern government is the politics of development. People and government influence each other towards accomplishment of the goals of development. Development today means empowerment of the people which implies people's capacity to solve their own problems, capacity to decide their own future, and ability to fulfil their basic needs of life.

The national governments of the developing countries are often found incapable of achieving their set developmental goals because of fund stringency, skill deficiency and technological inadequacy. Thus without finding alternative they invite private bodies, philanthropic organizations or non-government organizations (NGOs) to come to their assistance and supplement their deficiencies. It is often remarked that NGOs are the outcome of the 'organizational defeat' of the government.

The involvement of the NGOs in the development process of Bangladesh is not new. A good number of local and foreign NGOs are working as agents of development. These NGOs are providing diverse services like literacy

development, health education, self-employment, poultry-livestock projects, cottage industrial/agricultural technology, infrastructure-building etc. They are functioning not only as providers of services but also

Despite their efficient operations, innovativeness, and rich quality of services, doubts and suspicions are being entertained by some quarters about the operative goals of NGOs and also about genuineness of commitment.

as policy advocates to the government and as educators of the masses. NGOs are now in the Third Generation engaged in institution-building activities and capacity-building operations.

It is often remarked that NGOs have proved more efficient than the government organizations (GOs); they have developed effective delivery system capable of responding quickly to the needs of the people. NGOs are rich with their limited financial resources because they maintain frugality and economy; they spend each dollar in a judicious way, utilize human resources scrupulously. NGOs are rich not only in their technology of management but also in their attitudinal and behavioural pattern. They have been able to win the trust and confidence of the distressed and disadvantaged people because of their non-hierarchical and egalitarian conduct. With a few exceptions, people working for the NGOs are not found to display arrogance, false vanity; they are rather more accessible to the helpless poor than the disoriented traditional administrators of the public agencies. They are closely involved in the sorrows and sufferings of the humanity in distress. NGOs have earned popularity for practising altruistic principles. The most unambiguous example of altruism in action is their prompt humanitarian response to disasters — man-made or natural. NGOs are quick in reacting and delivering services and supplies to the affected people during the unprecedented 1988 floods, catastrophic tornado at Satturia in 1989 and recent cyclones in the Barisal and Chittagong regions.

NGOs and also about genuineness of commitment. They are often suspected to be the agents of colonial, exploitative and imperialist forces or as catalysts for intellectual and cultural colonization by the super-powers. The biggest challenge before the NGOs is therefore to disprove or falsify these allegations against them. Development for the sake of life and service for the sake of life — these should be their motto. In order that NGOs are able to enhance their role efficacy, the following steps may be suggested:

1) NGOs should clarify and publicise their goals and roles to the government and the target groups in unambiguous terms. There should not be any mist and fuzziness about their objectives. They should never practise any sort of hide-and-seek policy. Newspaper reports testify that many NGOs have victimized the innocent public by playing fraudulent games. The government should take stern punitive measures against these fake NGOs.

2) NGOs should always cherish noble intentions. They should not capitalize the weaknesses and failures of the GOs and government officials. They will do better if they come forward with a helping attitude to supplement the deficiencies of the GOs. NGOs and GOs should never consider each other their adversaries. They should rather treat themselves as the partners of the total development efforts of Bangladesh. They should be more collaborative, cooperative and coordinative with each other in as much as their clientele or beneficiary is common and their goals are alike. GOs and NGOs may differ in process and strategies but

they operate commonly for public welfare. 3) NGOs should not operate like isolated islands. The efforts of GOs and NGOs need to be integrated to achieve development goals. Deputy Commissioners and Upazila Nirbahi Officers may hold routine coordination meetings with the NGOs operating within their administrative jurisdiction to identify areas of operation so that no overlap and duplication occur leading

to waste of resources. The NGO Bureau may make a survey in order to ascertain the needs of the beneficiary. Needs should then be prioritized. The roles of GOs and NGOs should be differentiated and then ascribed depending upon their management and financial capability for the fulfillment of the people's needs after those being identified and prioritized.

4) Reported role conflict among NGOs themselves should be resolved. Tension or cold war between the GOs and

OPINION

Of Servants and Masters

My sympathies to Ms Fayza Haq who has been having a disappointing time with her servants as eloquently stated in the Dhaka Day by Day Article 'Where Have All The Servants Flown?' (Star 11 Aug). In fact her servants are so inefficient, pathetically melodramatic, and incorrigibly ignorant that she feels that 'I see no remedy for this apart from departing into a more mechanised and industrialised life'. As a passionate proponent of industrialisation in Bangladesh, I am always glad to hear of another supporter. However, the context in which the recommendation was made by Ms Haq leaves a bit to be desired. Rarely have I come across such a lopsided case made against an exploited class such as that of servants. I feel that a rebuttal is definitely justified on the grounds of human rights. This short essay has no empirical foundations apart from casual observation and I sincerely apologise to those concerned if the generalisations which characterise this piece are divorced from the true practices.

Servants in Bangladesh do not have written and legally enforceable contracts within which they could define and agree to the scope of their duties. The present structure of contracts are verbal and informal and they only deal with a very broad description of duties and determination of the salary level. Yet such a skeletal labour contract would be inconceivable in many industries. The following are examples of a number of important elements which are conspicuously missing from the present contracts.

There are no specified working hours. The supply of the servant's labour is expected to be extremely responsive to the needs of the employer. For example, if the employer has to catch a train at 4 a.m., the servant is expected to be up at that time as well. Moreover, the servant cannot expect to receive compensatory payments for having to get up at such an unreasonable hour.

Kaiser Kabir

The servant has almost a negligible right in refusing certain jobs, such as cleaning faeces, removing dead rats etc.

The servant cannot expect to have weekly or monthly holidays except under very special circumstances. Furthermore, a long serving servant cannot expect to get the benefit of a pension or a similar scheme.

The treatment of servants greatly varies across employers in respect to salaries and living conditions. However, the trait across employer household remains the same — that provisions beyond a subsistence living, especially human dignity are redundant or at best extras.

There is in fact a deep seated apartheid within the home of the employer. Although very likely the hardest working member within the household, the servant cannot expect to sleep on a proper bed, take meals with other members of the house, consume the same quality of food or use the same utensils used by the employer and his/her family. Worse still, the servant is not expected to express dissatisfaction over working conditions or demand the respect due to a human being.

The humiliation faced by the servant is probably not unknown to the employer. Yet the apparent inertia of the latter in creating a better working environment for the former is mind boggling. Could it be that the wide asymmetry in education, financial endowment, and overall superior status of the employer explains the status quo. Yet, does not the employer come into contact with persons with superior education or wealth? In such circumstances does not the employer expect to be asked to sit on a chair, share a meal, and in general be treated with respect? If so, why cannot the servant be entitled to the same expectations? Why should she/he be subjected to

such a high degree of hypocrisy?

Some may point out that in some corporate and bureaucratic hierarchies a kind of master-servant relationship is the norm. However, this by no means legitimizes the master-servant relationship at home. The practice of a retarded relationship at a higher strata of society is no excuse for its practice at lower levels.

A very clever argument used by the employer is that the servant would feel uncomfortable and out of place if treated like an ordinary member of the household. Undoubtedly this is true in many cases. Yet the superficiality of this argument is contemptible. The poor self image of the servant is most likely the result of several years of exploitation. It is the duty of the employer to make the servant aware of his/her basic human rights, rather than using his/her disadvantaged status for continuing morally reprehensible practices.

The fact of the matter is that the employers of servants have so far had very little incentive to respond to the discrimination faced by the former. Two facts stand out over the years — first, the supply of cheap domestic help far exceeds its demand; second, a servant generally does not have other marketable skills and hence has little alternative but to accept poor working conditions. These two factors combined have given the employers a lot of bargaining power in the market for servants, which in turn has led to unrealistic expectations about the functions of a servant.

Of course, as economic opportunities widen we may expect improvements in the contractual terms under which a servant is hired. But given the economy of Bangladesh one cannot expect such changes to take place in a short while. Hence, we may wait for decades, or alternatively take up the issue of servants rights as a moral obligation. Unfortunately, articles such as 'Where Have All The Servants Flown?' turns the issue on its head.

To the Editor...

Presidential nomination

Sir, In spite of having many statesman — like stalwarts in the party Awami League has been constantly demonstrating lack of maturity, sagacity and foresight in its utterances and actions.

Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed has amply proved to be a non-controversial, neutral and capable personality whose nomination for presidency of the People's Republic of Bangladesh could have been unanimous, and can still be so, should major political parties joined their heads together in appropriate time on this matter and people at large would welcome such eventually.

But Awami League has, to an

extent, tarnished the neutral image of the Justice and causes embarrassment for him by hasty and ill-timed announcement of their plan to nominate him as candidate for presidency (Star news, Aug 8).

As the second largest political party, it is expected that Awami League will strike balance in their thoughts, actions and pronouncements for sympathetic public consumption. Maqbul Ahmad, Noakhali.

BADC

Sir, It is gathered that there is a chance of losing jobs for thousands of BADC employees. Agriculture cannot run without timely supply of inputs, such as, seeds, fertiliser, pesticides etc. and necessary

technical services including irrigation facilities. Although there may be some gaps or lapses, still the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC), since its inception, has been contributing effectively in the agricultural development of the country through maintaining its nationwide supply and service network.

In the agricultural context of Bangladesh, the importance of BADC cannot be overlooked. As such, we would sincerely call upon the government to adopt urgent measures to retaining and further strengthening the organisation of BADC in the greater national interest.

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