

Hundred Days of Congress Government

by Sumanta Banerjee
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A Reckless Act

According to agency reports Dhaka Labour Court's decision to issue a show cause notice on Monday last, regarding the election of the Dhaka-Aricha Transport Workers' Union, triggered off a strike starting from 5 p.m. Wednesday, snapping road communication between Dhaka and 36 districts of north, south and southwest. The union's election was scheduled to be held today, which has now been halted. The dispute concerns four workers who did not find their names in the voters' list of the union election. The union leaders say that the four workers who have lodged the case have been expelled from the union for anti-organisational activities. However, the court found enough reason in the complaint to issue a show-cause notice as to why the union's election schedule will not be declared illegal.

This journal has consistently upheld the democratic right of the workers to take industrial action as and when the circumstances necessitate such actions. We have also supported the cause of the trade unions in their struggle to uphold the interest of the workers. However, serious questions have been raised by the action undertaken by the Dhaka-Aricha Transport Workers' Union in particular instance. Should a union go for strike against the ruling of a court? If they do, then how the legal process can function? Courts and judicial bodies are sacred entities. They enjoy the highest status for the simple reason that they have to settle disputes. They are the repository of the legal system where public can go to redress their grievances. What the courts express are the legal opinions, not necessarily the popular ones. In this particular instance the appropriate action of a responsible body like the union should have been to respond to the court's notice and see the legal process through. By going on a sudden strike the union has laid itself open to serious questions as to how respectful they are of the legal process and whether or not they are creating obstruction against the due process of law.

This brings us to a more general question of responsibility of the transport workers' unions. On other occasions we have seen unions using the weapon of strike a bit too frequently. Going on strike is a very serious action and should be resorted to only as the last step, and not the first. Such an action should be preceded by talks between the disputing parties, and if necessary in the presence of mediators. Only when everything fails should direct action be resorted to. In the case of transport workers we have seen that when they go on strike they not only cease to work but create obstructions that effectively stop all road links. Roads are public property and no party, group or union should have the right to obstruct traffic on them.

It is a serious matter when transport workers think nothing of severing road links between the capital city and 36 district headquarters, just because they don't like the Labour Court's decision. How can we expect democracy to take root, when the sanctity and status of the legal system is so challenged? As a major component of the democratic system, and as bodies that must play significant role in making the democratic process take firm root in our society, trade unions must show greater maturity, restraint and understanding. They must hold the national interest above everything else.

A Happy Vijaya to All

Today is the Vijaya — a day that celebrates victory. Victory of light over darkness, of God over Satan or of Ahura Mazda over Ahiman. The sub-continental devotees express this victory in terms of Durga destroying Mahisha, the demon. The goddess Durga, known more as Devi all over the sub-continent is not a native of the Bengal delta and comes from across aeons of time from hoary Aryan past. The Bengali ethos naturalised her first into a very Bengali loveform Uma and then as Parvati a more Bengali wife devoted to a rather difficult spouse and a dear mother to her four progeny — Ganesh, the giver, Kartikeya the warrior who is also a paragon of beauty — and the two favourites, sisters Lakshmi and Saraswati — goddesses presiding over man's material and spiritual wealth. Like all good Bengali housewives, Durga comes to her paternal estates in the eastern Himalayas for her yearly visit of 'nyor'. That's when the Puja is held — starting from the sixth day of the Aswin new moon.

The Puja brings back a certain nostalgic feeling among the devotees harking back to days of bygone centuries. Now that all of that is gone — the wealth of the mind remaining and on the mornings resplendent with the golden autumn sunshine the puja drums beat loud to broadcast the joy of living. The truth of this, rather than detracted, is heightened with Tagore's pointer — *matrithara maa jodi na pai tobey aaj kisher utsab?* — If the orphan does not find a mother today what is such jubilation for? If the destitute little girl that stands all coiled up at the rich man's puja pandal gate in Tagore's poem doesn't get a true share of the joy — *tobey michhey shahakar shakha, tobey michhey mongol kalosh* — the whole of this puja would be in vain.

The thought for a socio-economic fair deal for the underdog gains specially in pertinence because the puja is very much about all that a hedonist or an epicurean dreams of: *Dehi devt saubhagyamarogyam dehi param sukham/roopang dehi jayang dehi yasho dehi dvisho jahi*. The puja is more a festival than a worship. And for the devotees it is more a deeply felt sentiment for the world mother that all beings keep searching for eternally than a dry rote of ritual full of do's and don'ts. It is a celebration of humanity as well as of life. On this auspicious day we wish to all a happy Vijaya.

NEW DELHI: India's Congress (I)-led minority government completed its 100th day in office on September 17. In the midst of widespread disaffection over rising prices and intense speculation about the continuity of support from the Right-wing BJP (Bharatiya Janta Party) and the Centrist and Leftist parties which had been keeping the government propped up all these days.

Since early July the country has been witnessing a 5.3 per cent inflation in terms of the whole sale price index. This has been sparked off by the 20 per cent devaluation of the rupee. The Congress (I) which in its poll manifesto promised to 'roll back' prices of essential commodities within 100 days of coming to power, is now in a fix faced with persistent reminders of its promise by the electo rate and the Opposition. The commodities which were included in the Congress (I) poll manifesto were: diesel, kerosene, salt, edible oils, cycles and two-wheelers, electric bulbs, cotton sarees and dhotis, stoves, newspaper, postcards, inland letters. The Congress (I) is now modifying its choice of words and is claiming that it has 'arrested' the price rise. But even here, the claim is hollow, since in the market the prices are on the rise. In fact, the government itself has hiked up the prices of newspaper and edible oils.

Opposition Angry
The parties of the Opposition are angry with the ruling party on various counts. Till now, they had been supporting the government on the floors of parliament on an issue to issue bail. The Congress (I) also had been working out arrangements with either the Right, or the Centrists, or the Left from or legislative bill to another, so that it received the

required number of votes to remain in power. Since the Opposition is not united, it has been easier for the Congress (I) to come to a deal with one or the other group. Thus, it struck a deal with the BJP, under which the latter supported the Congress (I) candidature for the speakership of parliament, while the Congress (I) helped the BJP candidate to win the deputy speaker's post. It has introduced a bill in parliament seeking to freeze all places of worship built before independence as monuments. This is aimed at frustrating the plan of the BJP and other Hindu communal forces to destroy several ancient mosques (which they claim were sites of Hindu temples) and build temples in their place. While the Centrist parties like the Janata Dal of the former Prime Minister V.P. Singh and the Leftists like the CPI and CPI (M), are supporting the government on this issue, the BJP is naturally up in arms against the bill.

Although satisfied with the bill on places of worship, the Left-Centre alliance (represented by the National Front) is unhappy with the government over its economic policies which, they allege, have led to inflation and price rise, and to the unrestricted entry of multinationals in the country's industrial field. They are also opposed to the conditionalities imposed by the IMF while giving loans to India, as they fear these will lead to a drastic cut in social welfare measures and to retrenchment of workers in factories. At a massive rally in the capital on September 27, leaders of the alliance lashed out at the government and threatened to bring it down by withdrawing support in parliament.

BJP
The BJP is also flexing its muscles. Its poll platform was

raised on the promise of demolishing the Babri mosque in Ayodhya and replace it with a temple to commemorate the birth of Rama. By using this it succeeded in whipping up a mob frenzy among the Hindu voters, who not only voted a sizeable number of BJP candidates to parliament, but also voted the BJP to power in four north Indian states. Today, the BJP and its ally, the VHP (Vishva Hindu Parishad) are on the war path. They have decided to start building the temple sometime in October or November.

The BJP's timing of the temple construction programme is significant. Several by-elections to Parliament are pending, and they are expected to be held in November. The BJP is determined to ensure that the Congress (I) government at the centre does not secure the necessary number of seats through these by-elections, to get a majority. They are therefore planning to have local level adjustments with rival political parties in order to avoid triangular contests and set up a single Opposition candidate against the Congress (I). If they can further synchronize the pre-poll campaign with the temple construction programme, they hope to rouse the electoral fervour to a feverish pitch.

The Left parties are in a dilemma. They are opposed to the Congress (I) government, but they do not want to bring down P.V. Narasimha Rao's government to make way for the emergence of the BJP at the head of the central government in New Delhi. The CPI and the CPI (M) leaders quite often in their speeches assert that communalism — both the Hindu and Muslim va-

rieties — is a bigger danger than the Congress (I). To resist the communalists they frequently give the call for the alliance of all 'democratic and secular forces' in Indian politics. It is quite likely therefore that in some constituencies they may come to some sort of agreement with the Congress (I) to bring about the defeat of the BJP candidates.

Secessionism
Meanwhile, apart from the problems of price rise and inflation, the old problems in Kashmir, Punjab and the north-east continue to plague both the ruling Congress (I) and the Opposition parties. None appears to have any answer to the growing secessionist and terrorist activities in these areas. The BJP till now had been denouncing the separatist movements in Punjab and Kashmir as religious secessionism (Sikhs in Punjab and Muslims in Kashmir) inspired by foreign powers. Now, a similar secessionist terrorist movement has broken out in Assam. But the leaders who are spearheading the movement are neither Muslims nor Sikhs, but Hindus — the co-religionists of the BJP leaders. This has taken the ground off the BJP assertion that all Indian Hindus want a single Indian nation, and that it is only the non-Hindus like Muslims and Sikhs who want secession.

When it comes to secessionist movements, both the ruling party and the Opposition parties irrespective of their ideological hues, are unanimous in seeking a military solution to them. Draconian laws, indiscriminate arrests of innocent people, deployment of army, shooting down of women and children

all such violation of human rights has been allowed in villages of Punjab, Kashmir and Assam all these years both under the Janata Dal rule under Prime Minister V.P. Singh (1989-90) and the present Congress (I) regime. Neither the ruling party nor the Opposition parties today are in favour of a democratic solution of imbroglia in Kashmir, Punjab and Assam through a dialogue with the militants there and a restoration of the democratic process through elections. Kashmir remains under President's rule, with the elected representatives of the people there without any channel to voice popular grievances. In Punjab, President's rule has been extended every six months during the last four years — since May 11, 1987. The central government keeps on promising the people there that elections would be held soon to allow the people to choose their own government. But for the seventh time, on September 18 this year, the government extended president's rule for another six months, promising elections by February 15 next year.

Narasimha Rao's minority government managed to pass the resolution extending Presidential rule by another six months with the help of support from the CPI (M). In a curious realignment of forces in Parliament, the BJP the Janata Dal and the CPI opposed the government resolution.

Fluid Situation
The experience of the last 100 days of Congress (I) regime indicates an extremely fluid political situation. There is no sharp polarization on any political issue among the parties. The major Opposition party in parliament, the BJP, has sometimes sided with the ruling party, and sometimes

opposed it. The same policy has been pursued by the Left and the centrists. The entire Opposition — ranging from the Right to the Left appeared to have been more concerned with the need for keeping the minority Congress (I) government in power. Although such a role from the Opposition might appear to be paradoxical, there is a motive behind it. None among the Opposition parties right now is in a position to face another general election — which will have to be called if the present minority government falls. The game that is being played by the Opposition therefore is to bide its time. It hopes to pressurize the minority government to take certain measures that may help them, and at the same time attack it for the unpopular measures that it may be forced to take for unsurmountable reasons (like accepting IMF conditionalities, devaluation of the Indian rupee and the resulting inflation). Both the BJP and the National Front will play their trump card when they find that they are ready to face the electorate, and then they will bring down the government.

But, as indicated above, the interests and the time schedule of the BJP and the National Front alliance may not synchronize. The time that may suit the BJP may not be favourable for the Left-centre alliance and vice versa. The issues on which the Left-Centre coalition may want to confront the Congress (I) government and defeat it in parliament, may not be shared by the BJP. It is this division which helps the Narasimha Rao government to survive and will in all probabilities continue to indirectly prop it up as long as a new alternative correlation of forces emerges.

Administrative Culture and Related Issues-II

by Tafazzal Hussain

ONE may wonder how inspections were done in earlier days. A Divisional Commissioner sent his four-day tour programme to a District Magistrate in 1960. Elaborate reports were prepared and charts and papers made ready for the Commissioner's inspection. The Commissioner came on due date and didn't ask for any specific report on paper. Everyday, he went out in steam launches and speed-boats to far-flung areas, accompanied by District Magistrate and his officers.

The trips were remarkable, though strenuous. Before he left, he just observed that a District Officer is primarily responsible for running his district. If he had any problem, he would himself tackle it or ask for advice from his superior officer. The Divisional Commissioner felt that this would be conducive to strengthen the initiative and self-confidence of the district officials.

One more example can be given of a healthy old time bureaucratic fellow-feeling. In 1961, there was a devastating cyclone. The Senior Member, Board of Revenue, who was in overall charge of the relief operations came for a prolonged 10-day on-the-spot inspection of on-going relief work. The Additional Deputy Commissioner of the district and a local SDO in the worst affected area was in the inspection team to assist the Senior Member. The team toured the entire affected areas in and around Bhola and offshore islands by steam launch, jeep, speed-boat and on foot every day and returned to the base camp at about midnight. This daily routine continued throughout the 10-day-long trip. At the end of the tour, the district staff nazir placed be-

fore the ADM the bill covering the cost of food and other incidentals during the trip. The latter as the senior-most district officer in the team ventured to pay the total bill himself. When the Senior Member, Board of Revenue, came to know about it, he dismissed the ADM's idea by a cryptic but polite remark: "It is the privilege of the senior-most member in the party to play the host and none else." This was the tradition of mutual fellow-felling then existing amongst members of bureaucracy irrespective of rank and status.

The Missing Type
The above narrative stories were unavoidable. This was not to offer any apologia for the British colonial system of administration or for the rigid elite practices of the Pakistani bureaucracy. My whole purpose is to demonstrate through illustrations that we are missing that type of an administrative culture which had its own value, but has been destroyed, step by step, by autocratic rulers since the time of independence up to the present day except for a few years in between. Things turned worse during nine years of undiluted one-man rule or Ershad, narrow selfish objectives, open corrupt practices, shameless competition to please the big boss, wastage of national wealth, naked showmanship, loss of self-respect and all moral values, etc gripped the administrative machinery. Ultimately, what happened was that members of the bureaucracy, by and large, were converted into tools of all corrupt practices in every way that suited the top man and his party. The administration was thrown into its blackest period of demoralization.

The question is how to repair the great damage already

done. It is not enough just to say that, now that parliamentary democratic system of government has set in, with due accountability to the people, the members of bureaucracy must rise to the occasion and do their part properly. The administration now has various undesirable elements constituting it. There are people who had strong political affiliations as also those who were just opportunists. Such elements of bureaucracy must have to come back to their proper place and be true to their tradition. In so far as they have to carry out their official duties, they cannot allow their own political views to come into play. They should be true to their salt and must respect their sound culture of behaving with dignity, fairplay, impartiality and such other administrative virtues as were obtaining before. They cannot betray their conscience and carry out any unlawful order. In short, there must be an honest heart-searching for all of them, with a view to correcting their wrong approaches or unethical thinking, if any. They must believe that, above all, they are accountable to their conscience. There must be a realization that it is as much the responsibility of politicians to foster democracy as it is the duty of every public servant to assist in the process. Indeed, this cannot be achieved overnight. The political will is there. The Prime Minister has already given a sense of direction.

Mutual Trust
The political leaders and Members of Parliament have no doubt their duty to strengthen the hands of the Prime Minister. The bureaucracy will also play its part. But the dignity and self-respect of every member of administration have to be honoured. Nothing should be done to dismiss their personality, their courage of conviction and initiative. Mutual trust has to be cultivated. No interference in the discharge of their lawful job done in good faith. In one word, the bureaucracy must enjoy a sense of security. This alone will raise their morale, which is a 'sine qua non' of honest and dedicated service.

The administration, however, should not be wanting in contributing to the whole process of transformation of a corrupt system into a healthy one. It is time that arms of administrative structure get back their own healthy culture and regain the love and respect of the people. There is no doubt that given the will, they can do it. This is a country of selfless freedom fighters who earned independence and this is a land, where students working jointly brought democracy, and politicians agreeing unanimously ushered in the much-desired parliamentary system of government.

Meeting Training Needs
Finally, one word has to be said about the standard of administration. It is admitted that since independence, most of the new recruits in government service are not up to desired level. This is inevitable in a developing country, where large appointments have to be made to meet the country's increasing needs. Here comes the question of proper grooming and training, the need for which cannot be overemphasized. Of course, government has already arrangements for 'foundational' and practical training in different aspects.

following a news item published in your esteemed daily captioned "World Bank studying alternatives to Jamuna Bridge" recently.

It is a long standing demand of the people to see the project implemented. Moreover, members of the public are also contributing in the form of 'Levy' imposed by the government for raising funds for the project the cost of which has been estimated at \$450 m.

We are shocked to know that the Internal Economic Rate of Return (IERR) or economic viability of the proposed project shown by Bangladesh government has been termed as 'exaggerated' by the World Bank team visiting Bangladesh recently. It also learnt that they are now making a comparative study between that viability of a bridge and improved ferry services linking the eastern and western parts of the country. Whatever improved ferry system in place of a bridge of multiple use can never meet

the needs of the people. For instance, there are ferry services at the Aricha-Nagarbari-Daulatia ghat and other places. But passengers have to suffer a lot for most of the time some ferry-boats remain inoperative. One of my colleagues had a chance to visit there recently. To his utter surprise, he found 1000 goods - loaded trucks waiting in a long queue to cross Aricha-Nagarbari ghat. The trucks were stranded there because four ferry boats turned inoperative within the span of a fortnight. The trucks were carrying perishable items. This is a common picture of other ferry ghats in the country.

I would therefore, request the government to reconstitute the national committee for reviewing the progress of Jamuna Bridge Project immediately to mobilise public as well as political support for successful implementation of the much needed project.

Md Atiqul Karim
41/15, Jigatala, Dhaka.

OPINION

Women Take Long Hours!

It is an age long depressing fact that, to a certain extent, women are considered the inferior sex, not only in Bangladesh but all over the world. Some of the recent reports have even revealed that more than 65 per cent of women suffer in the world from poverty and sexual discrimination. This should in every way push the women in all fields to fight, and revolt strongly. Sadly enough we come across a few who decide to take a reverse step in this regard, while in the process of upgrading themselves. One such incident was evitable when reading an interview of a woman banker published locally in an international English weekly, in its early October issue.

It was indeed shocking to see that this high-ranking banker is enveloped by wrong conceptions. It is quite difficult to blame anyone specifically. She has no right to have degraded women in general to such a great extent, so as to say that "they can not take in long hours", and many such similar allegations. Ironically, these are typical male chauvinistic comments, far from being expected from any woman. Here we have a lady who is blind to the working hours of women in certain government offices, woman doctors and journalists, even some in her own profession, and also the others who work in factories. The working woman shoulders a non-stop responsibility, starting from her office work, dealing with her colleagues and officials, and later carrying on at home.

This efficient lady banker has mentioned, that some of the others who joined with her in the bank have left. But when asked the reason why they left (which is rather an irrelevant question during her exclusive interview), she shrugged off by indirectly referring to them as quite easy going. Why did she not mention about the men who joined with her and have left? Were they unprofessional? Can't they take in long hours? And talking about the women who have left — are they at home looking after their siblings and

Rahi Khan
Laimata, Dhaka

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.

'All about telephone'
Sir, I would first like to congratulate Mr M A Mohi-ud-Din for his well documented feature in the opinion column (Daily Star 14/10/91). We have to pay the bill whatever be the amount, and that by the due date; otherwise the telephone line will be snapped. Similar is the case with electric bills and the WASA bills. They all seem to have in common power to make our life miserable, as they all make us a hostage to their arbitrary dispensation and any protest is futile. Even persistent protests do not bring any relief as they are rejected summarily without examining their merits, if any.

The World Bank Vice President Mr Atilla Karaosmanoglu is reported to have