

Dhaka, Thursday, December 5, 1991

The Task Ahead

Following the unanimous adoption on Wednesday of a seven-point resolution aimed at putting an end to the rising crescendo of violence in the education sector, the government of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia now has a clear signal from the opposition camp that it will not obstruct or protest any police action against perpetrators of crime on the campuses. While it is a little difficult to understand why a government should need such a green signal to carry out what is essentially a law and order function, we can still afford to draw some satisfaction from the positive aspects of the meeting.

At this point, however, we have to note with regret the absence of the deputy leader of the opposition Abdus Samad Azad from the meeting. Azad, who has emerged as one of the country's most respected parliamentarians and who was publicly requested by the Prime Minister to attend the meeting, could have added even greater weight and meaning to the discussions.

But most importantly, the decision by political parties not to nurture "armed cadres" or to have anything to do with arms bearers, stands as a positive outcome of the meeting, by which they also went a long way towards admitting that their boys had, in fact, been involved in violent activities.

With the statement of intent now a publicly-stated fact, the task of cleaning up the house should begin without any further delay. Unless action is taken immediately, the meeting and the resolution will inevitably run the risk of being exposed as no more than a public relations exercise, just as the last "grand conference" held in August unfortunately turned out to be.

The government has all the resources of the state at its disposal as well as the explicit backing of the opposition. Words, statements and public speeches at this or that avenue or chattr should now be replaced by action. The things that should now matter above all else are those that are being done by the ministries of home affairs and education. The public needs to see total sincerity from the government in its approach to the task, and a single-minded determination to make campus violence and unscheduled closures a thing of the past. The police and the judiciary need to recover a sense of purpose and confidence in their pursuit and prosecution of law-breakers, without interference from any political quarters, be they government or otherwise.

With the meeting setting out the broad outline of agreement, the special parliamentary committee set up last September to deal with the issue, but virtually dormant ever since, must now be given its due role. We must not forget that, in a parliamentary system, it is the elected representatives of the people in the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) who have the responsibility and mandate to debate and recommend policies on issues of national importance. Since seven of the 15 parties at Wednesday's meeting do not have members in parliament and many of the other parties were represented by non-MPs, the meeting's resolution can only be taken as something the parliamentary committee should consider as a guideline achieved on the basis of consensus. The JS committee needs to reassert its vital role, by holding regular meetings and recommending and monitoring specific courses of actions to the government.

In order to make its role more effective, the committee should seriously think about inviting people with a direct interest in the issue such as Vice-Chancellors of universities, Principals of colleges, high ranking police officers, representatives of teachers and student bodies etc., to attend and express views at its regular sittings. The professionals would provide the parliamentarians with a wealth of information and insight which could prove invaluable to the job of formulating recommendations.

Salute the Volunteers

The spirit of volunteerism — the term seems to be in vogue now — should get a new lease of life today when, under the aegis of the United Nations, the International Volunteer Day is observed throughout the world. On this day, we are saluting thousands of men and women of different countries, who are engaged in assisting people outside their national frontiers, in projects which, without making headlines in the media, touch and sometimes change the lives of others. Such projects may range from planting a tree in an Indian village to providing health care in a Manila slum. It can be argued that countries should not ask foreign volunteers to do the jobs which locals could do very well. The other — and a better — way of looking at the phenomenon is to recognise that participation of a Bangladeshi in a slum clearance programme in Manila or the involvement of a British NGO in computer training project in Dhaka promotes international solidarity at different levels and, what's more, a certain cross-fertilisation of ideas.

It is good to know from a report published in this paper yesterday that several Bangladeshis have made their mark in voluntary activities in different countries, geographically as far apart as the Philippines and Zambia. Whatever system is followed in the recruitment of volunteers from this country, let us hope that efforts will be made to enlarge the programme and that the authorities here whose concern over the rising number of unemployed educated young men and women is turning into alarm would extend to it all possible assistance.

Since volunteers work for modest pocket allowances, we cannot see the system in terms of employment in the conventional sense. But we do see it as a training ground, one in which the mental horizon of a volunteer is broadened and his or her concern for disadvantaged groups strengthened. When such a volunteer eventually returns to his or her home country, say, to Bangladesh, does the person look at the situation around with a changed attitude? Is there any possibility that such a person would join the minority which plays a modest role in transforming our society into a caring one, away from senseless violence, rampant corruption and crude materialism? Perhaps the possibility exists, to a small degree. Herein lies our hope, a hope that we share with people who observe the day without much fanfare, but with a sense of quiet dedication.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY - II

Statesmanship, Commitment Need of the Hour

by M. Syeduzzaman

Star Guest Columnist

In fostering economic development and soundness of financial institutions as the prime mover of economic activities has a special role to play. In commercial banks as in development financing institutions, the owners and regulatory agencies have joint responsibility for building up confidence of the savers and ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently for the greater welfare of the citizens.

Unfortunately, we in Bangladesh have not set the best example in this respect. Other South Asian countries are also working hard to restore the health of the financial institutions. The recent collapse of the cooperative banking system in a province of Pakistan seems to show that white collar crime is not typical of industrial countries only. In the financial sector, what helps to establish accountability is a strong and independent Central Bank with substantial autonomy and insulated from political pressures. A strong central bank is not only good for ensuring the accountability in the financial sector, it is also a source of strength to the government.

This brings us to the subject of accountability of the government itself. Mere existence of a parliament, a council of ministers, a bureaucracy, and a judiciary is not enough. It requires professionally competent personnel working within a well defined system of rules of business to develop an accountable administration. Provision of the office of an Ombudsman in some constitutions including the constitution of Bangladesh arises from this consideration. Much to our regret, conceived with the best of intentions, this office has remained vacant for the past twenty years! Much has been said about separation of the judiciary from the executive and much remains to be done. Some governments seem to overlook the need for keeping the legislative and the executive functions at arm's length from each other. This has important implications for public accountability, allocation of re-

sources, and consequently, economic developments.

We in Bangladesh face an exceptionally difficult combination of circumstances in our pursuit of economic reforms like many South Asian countries. Economic reforms are easier to undertake against a background of broad based public support. This calls for a high degree of transparency in policy making. Public support will be forthcoming if the government by its action can demonstrate that policies will be applied equitably and for long term benefit of the economy as a whole. Economic development efforts will produce better results if there is common perception that a government is competent and fair, and is keen to establish accountability through its actions. During the past decade, conscious delinking of arbitrary increase of wages and benefits from productivity and

system of accountability is greater in a socialist economy because the iron rod of the market is absent. But in the absence of a system of political accountability actual compliance has been far from desired. Massive manipulation of statistics is only one item among many of the well known ills of some socialist economies which brought their sudden and rapid collapse.

One feature of the South Asian economic development process is a large presence of donors in most countries. Any discussion of accountability must touch upon this subject. Governments using foreign aid and foreign resources, particularly those that create debt obligations, have to ensure that resources are used to the best advantage of the country, and

destabilize the development process of the recipient countries.

It needs to be realized that there is point of optimality in the process of enforcing accountability. Enforcement of accountability will help economic development only when it is kept within the limits of rationality, beyond which it may hurt the development process. In many instances, in the South Asian countries also deregulation has followed unsustainable overregulation. Overdesigning of a system of accountability with archaic rules may slow down the development process. Many such instances can be found in the payment systems of some South Asian countries. The system of accounting and audit, therefore, needs continuous

from the quality of service delivery — be it in education, health or provision of public utilities. In fact with gov't's role more and more confined to the social sectors and infrastructures, the quality aspect will become more and more important. It is all the more necessary where the citizen is poor and helpless. The citizens must be made aware of and must know what they can expect from the public system, like they know what they are not getting from the education system, or the public transport system or the power distribution system. This concern is becoming pronounced in the evaluation of the development process all over the world. We hear more and more of the concern regarding sustainable economic development and preservation of the environment. These concepts are nothing but pointers to the need for intergenerational and

parliament. We have lived with bureaucratic, authoritarian and pseudo-democratic systems for most part of our existence. Governments in their hunger for legitimacy, and at times under external pressure, have made attempts to bring in some appearance of accountability. So, though some form of accountability have crept in over the years, it has not been enough to prevent wastage of resources which has hurt the process of economic development. Economic development and reforms in most South Asian countries call for hard choices. It calls for statesmanship, professionalism and commitment, particularly at a time of economic austerity. Any attempt to buy popularity with sacrifice or irrational use of public resources will undermine the very process of accountability.

In summary, I would like to say that, though the new economic philosophy for economic development in South Asian countries seem to call for a reduction in the role of the government, it will call for increased accountability of the government to the societies. It will call for increased accountability of the private sector, and in that context of the profession of Accountants. The South Asian governments have held themselves accountable to their people by jointly subscribing to the objective of eradicating poverty. Only sustained growth and economic development can help to realize this objective. Economic change calls for coordinated efforts of the government, the entrepreneurs, and of the professionals. It is binding on the entrepreneurs and the professionals to complement the efforts of the governments in bringing change in our societies through a process of accountability.

(Concluded)

This article is extracted from the author's key-note speech at the Sixth Conference of South Asian Federation of Accountants (SAFA), held at Dhaka on 29-30 November 1991.

Though the new economic philosophy for economic development in South Asian countries seem to call for a reduction in the role of the Government, it will call for increased accountability of the Government to the societies.

efficiency has been the most unfortunate and damaging thing in government's public policy. This has been done repeatedly for public employees as well as for powerful non-official groups enjoying government subvention. What is worse, such decisions have also been imposed on the private sector, contradicting gov't's own policy of giving the private sector more freedom. This happened despite strong advice and caution to the contrary. Such action has thrown accountability out through the window and has been damaging to the economy. This is irresponsible public resource management. Such measures may achieve short-term distorted political gains but will not promote private investment, thus defeating gov't's own policies.

The most prosaic example of what lack of accountability can do to an economic system is that of the socialist economies. For one thing, the need for a well ordered strong

create more resources for eventual repayment of those debts. This brings in the whole spectrum of realistic development planning, setting of priorities, allocation of resources according to declared priorities, formulation of programmes and projects, and their efficient implementation. The so-called conditionalities which the donors prescribe are broadly based on these general objectives in the management of the economy in macro and micro spheres. Donors make it clear that in suggesting these conditions they reflect the will of their electorate and legislature for ensuring proper use of their public resources, according to the obvious needs of the recipient countries, another name for accountability to their own citizens. One must also note that donors also have an obligation to the aid recipients. Recipients have to be assured of reasonable continuity of aid policies and philosophies. Frequent and sudden change of aid policies may in fact

updating and modernization, consistent with deregulation. It needs to be appreciated that financial accountability, like political accountability, need not be a black and white concept. Different degrees of accountability can be visualized consistent with results of actions. Economic development requires bold and vigorous action. If one cuts some corners to achieve results, it should not be necessarily construed as violation of accountability. What needs to be ensured is that there is no material deviation from norms, and no material lapse in the conduct of affairs. Mechanical imposition of accountability may be inimical to the implementation of development programmes and projects.

Finally, one may note that economic development does not mean only increasing productive capacity. It involves improvement in the quality of life also. The qualitative aspect of economic development cannot be captured in terms of money. It has to be judged

intertemporal accountability. What we have discussed here is, therefore, a generalized concept of accountability involving financial, administrative and political accountability, in the context of economic development. The concept of financial accountability meshes in with its other two dimensions. None of this is by itself adequate for ensuring economic development. In this concept institutions and individuals together build up an accountable system. Even the best Audit Reports prepared by the best Auditor General cannot be effective in the absence of a strong and attentive parliament backed by an enlightened public that deeply cares about financial accountability. The best report prepared by the most competent Chartered Accountant's firm will not be meaningful in the absence of professionally competent persons in the regulatory system, and wide-aware shareholders.

In Bangladesh, except for a very short period we did not have an effective and active

Volunteerism: the Key to Emancipation

by B.A. Gamini Gunasingha

TODAY we join the world in celebrating the 6th anniversary of International Volunteers Day. The day is observed globally on the 5th December every year on the basis of a United Nations general assembly declaration in 1985.

The day is a special significance in a world which is becoming more and more opportunistic. The primary purpose of this day is to create special interest among the people to spare some time for the less privileged ones such as elders, patients, disabled, neglected children and destitute women. It is also a willingness to uphold the voluntary spirit which bolsters people living in conditions of poverty and increases possibilities of development of nations living in hardship.

Service to others is as old as mankind. From the earliest community self-help activities up to the emergence of today's worldwide multilateral development programmes, people have been driven to improve their imperfect world. Development requires people's participation and involvement with good understanding of their surroundings. Voluntary participation of the people has been a tradition and is very common in Asian societies like that of Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Voluntary action — be it the early establishment of village self-help movements and community cooperatives or such endeavours as that of Gautama Buddha, Albert Schweitzer, Mahatma Gandhi and Florence Nightingale — has consistently formed the foundation of humanity's noblest works.

Mother Teresa, in her 80's today, is one of the greatest volunteers who has done tremendous services for the poor and destitutes for more than half a century. "If you love mankind, you never hurt mankind. Instead you work for the good of mankind." (Mother Teresa). The idea of helping each other and sharing joys

and sorrows among people is the base of the modern concept of volunteerism.

Noble Concept

The noble concept of volunteerism which dates back thousands of years has today become a global phenomenon and is recognized all over the world. The recognition has started flowing around the world as a result of which voluntary organizations have started working in most underdeveloped countries. Today, volunteerism has taken new dimension and a fuller image and is playing a significant role in the international technical cooperation for development. US President George Bush had said, "From now on in America, any definition of a successful life must include helping others." This should encourage every US citizen to get involved in volunteer work and adding volunteerism to their lives.

Serving others should start from our childhood and this most valuable principle must be applied to every student, and the school should be converted into a volunteer resource centre to serve the people, particularly in the school's locality and the community as a whole. Students can play a vital role in voluntary work. They can implement various activities from the school premises and increase the sphere of work to the village and beyond. This small practice will lead to nation building and in future those who will take the country's leadership will be ready to serve mankind better by promoting community welfare.

Why we need volunteerism: Everyone in the society should be able to help others. Volunteering should be a way of life for all people; be they rich or poor, it does not matter. Anyone can volunteer his or her time, money, resources, knowledge, etc. for the general good.

In not too distant past, people in the villages lived as a family, sharing their resources,

helping each other build their houses etc. Interdependence was a relic of the past history that brought people under one umbrella. Today, various voluntary organizations are trying to reawaken this practice, working at the grassroots level sending volunteers from different countries to spread this practice in the society. This volunteer effort and energy must be properly used and should be replicated by the people to develop their own villages, their country and the world at large.

Through volunteerism there are many tasks which can be implemented at the village level. A good example of voluntary labour was the building of giant tanks for irrigation in Sri Lanka. This unique effort was done through voluntary work by the guidance and personal leadership of the kings who ruled the country. People contributed labour voluntarily and utilized available resources for the betterment of the nation.

Nowadays people expect everything to be accomplished by the government. This is a wrong concept which needs to be eliminated from our minds. Community participation and donation of voluntary labour is the tool to solve most problems at the community level especially in Bangladesh. When cyclone and floods occur we need more volunteers in the relief and rehabilitation work for the victims.

UN Volunteers: The UNV aims at accommodating chances for youth to display their talents in the execution of national economic plan and the implementation of international cooperation programme and at giving labour and technical support to the development projects, facilitating international understanding and increasing global concern in development work through mutual exchanges among youths. In particular, efforts are being made to direct attention on giving assistance to the development

work of the developing countries and laying importance to further expanding and developing the organizations.

More Voluntary Organisations

The world needs more sincere voluntary organizations especially at the grassroots level to help mobilize community people into voluntary work with emphasis on youth participation. UNDP recruits young and qualified people around the world to serve other countries as volunteers. This year has seen the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Volunteers programme and 2,000 UNV specialists and grassroots field

workers are serving around the world. The International Voluntary Services Inc (IVS) is nearing its 40th anniversary with 1,200 volunteers having served in at least 35 countries.

In Japan, there are voluntary organizations which specialize in helping and taking care of elderly people. Japan Youth Volunteer Association (JYVA) is one such organization which is training recruits from many parts of the world to help elderly people, primary health care, etc. Volunteer organizations currently give much emphasis to African countries in sending volunteers because Africa has a greater need.

Volunteers are a special breed. But it is a breed with dwindling numbers everyday.

For many non-profit community organizations, volunteers are the backbone of their operations. On this day, the contributions of these volunteers are acknowledged and applauded and a call to more people from all walks of life is sent to offer their services as volunteers both at home and abroad. The volunteer spirit is an individual's noblest contribution to his fellowmen and the countless development and humanitarian efforts and inclination. "Let's keep the volunteer spirit alive, day after day, year after year."

Gamini Gunasingha is IVS volunteer. This article has been written to commemorate the International Volunteer Day which falls on 5th December.

OPINION

H. S. Suhrawardy as I Knew Him

A.M.F. Quadir

Mr. Husseyn Shahid Suhrawardy was a prince amongst men. A scion of one of the noble Muslim families of Bengal which produced illustrious sons like Sir Zahid Suhrawardy, Sir Abdullah Al Mamoon Suhrawardy, Sir Hasnain Suhrawardy, Mr. Husseyn Shahid Suhrawardy was one who was embodied with the qualities of head and heart. Being a Xaverian himself he studied in Oxford where he was also the President of Oxford Majlis, an unique position to hold in those days. He was one who as a Bangali arranged a reception in honour of Poet Rabindranath Tagore when he visited London around 1926. After he joined politics he always took up the cause of the down-trodden and fought for the labour. He got his initial training from his mentor Barrister C. R. Das known as Deshbandhu from Dhaka and worked with Subhas Chandra Bose, his very close associate. Both were firebrands and both developed hatred for the rulers of India in those days.

I remember quite a few incidents which showed his firmness in dealing with the British rulers. Once, when he was a cabinet minister of Bengal he had requested Mr. Durno, the then district magistrate, 24 Parganas, for certain work to be done. It was good of Mr. Suhrawardy to have put in the request in mild words. Mr. Durno had probably taken his mild and modest words to be weak enough not to give it a consideration it deserved and said, "Sorry it cannot be done." Mr. Suhrawardy was one who would not take a 'no' for an answer from any one particularly a ruling British. He roared on the telephone and

said, "Mr. Durno, in that case you take it as a verbal order from me, written order will follow." Long after, when he was chief minister and Mr. R. L. Walker was the chief secretary, a cabinet meeting was to be held at 10.30 a.m. with the governor of Bengal in the chair. The governor had arrived 10 minutes earlier. The chief secretary rushed to inform the chief minister that "his excellency" had arrived. Mr. Suhrawardy snubbed the chief secretary saying, "Walker, the governor had come 10 minutes early, don't you see I am having a wash and then I will dress. Tell the governor to wait." Such was his personality.

C. R. Das left two lieutenants in Bengal one was Subhas Bose the other, H.S. Suhrawardy. Subhas, in spite of Gandhi's campaigning against him, won the election in the Tripuri Congress in 1938 and became the president of Indian National Congress. He was the one who differed with Gandhi and exposed him and his tirade against Bengal. Suhrawardy was one who fought against Jinnah and exposed him. Jinnah died but tirade against East Pakistan remained. The last but one of the mohicans was Ayub Khan, and his tirade against East Pakistan continued. His successor saw the break of Pakistan and out came Bangladesh. He never bowed down his head in front of any one, not even before Mr. Jinnah. He was the first person to voice his protest when Mr. Jinnah brought out a list of persons to be named as the cabinet ministers in the interim government and read

out the names in the Muslim League convention held at Hotel Imperial, New Delhi in 1947. From that moment the rift started.

In his later life Suhrawardy confronted President Ayub in a very steadfast manner. He always kept his head high. The letter he wrote to president Ayub Khan was a million dollar one. It was published in the then Pakistan Observer. There he wrote to say that being a Sandhurst trained person how could president Ayub understand the fruits of freedom. When Mr. Suhrawardy and his other compatriots were struggling for independence of the country Mr. Ayub Khan was probably enjoying his life in the Army mess. Mr. Suhrawardy wrote, "You call me a refugee, who was not a refugee even your Mr. Jinnah was a refugee and so was Liaquat Ali Khan." No one could cow down his indomitable spirit. Such was he.

Mr. H. S. Suhrawardy was the one who was a pivot in creating the political party named Awami League. It was headed by him till he was alive. After his death the leadership went to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. President Ayub Khan ultimately handed over powers to Yahya Khan who continued persecution of East Pakistan. After an unprecedented holocaust, where lakhs of lives were lost followed by a war, we freed our homeland from the clutches of the alien rulers and got independent and sovereign Bangladesh. Every moment we felt the absence of the great dynamic leader Mr. Husseyn Shahid Suhrawardy and now crying we say "Thou shouldst be living at this hour."

Long live Suhrawardy. Long live Bangladesh.

Parabat Express

Sir, It was very thoughtful of Mr. Quadir to have written a letter to you about the departure time of Parabat Express from Sylhet. It seems no one has cared to give it a thought or consideration that it deserved.

If the departure time of the said Express is delayed by half an hour/fifty-five minutes i.e. 1430/1445 hours on Fridays only, I am sure no heaven would fall. On the other hand, thousands of devotees will get

an opportunity of offering their Juma prayers.

Abu M. Faiz
Dhaka 1205.

Hasina's SOS

Sir, I have been reading in the newspaper peoples' reactions on Sheikh Hasina's so called SOS to foreign missions and donor agencies which naturally appears to have greatly undermined the sovereignty of Bangladesh. Perhaps she could send her SOS to the President or Prime Minister of this country.