

Dhaka, Tuesday, March 24, 1992

Scandals in DCC

Most city corporations in the world serve as breeding grounds for rampant corruption, irregular appointments, wastage of funds and, indeed, for all forms of wrongdoing. In this respect, the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) would certainly be somewhere near the top of the list, outdoing quite a few civic bodies in this region and outside, in the way it carried out its activities, to put it plainly, to please three successive mayors during the nine-year regime of the ousted president, Hussain Muhammad Ershad.

The 15-page White Paper published on Sunday documented numerous anomalies which marked the successive DCC administrations of Major General (Rtd) Mahmud Hassan, Col (Rtd) Abdul Malek and Nazim Rahman, all members of the Jatiya Party (JP).

The anomalies, too mild an expression in this context, reached staggering proportions in a number of areas. The first and foremost irregularity related to appointment of people in different categories — 953 altogether under the three mayors between 1986 and 1990 — which were in clear violation of the established rules and procedures of the Corporation. Then, all three allegedly diverted large funds from projects to general funds and used them in the way it suited their personal and political purposes. Several other irregularities were allegedly committed by all three heads of the Corporation. In fact, the list of complaints contained in the White Paper is just too long to be repeated here.

We must indeed congratulate the Government for bringing out the White Paper containing information which might be largely unknown to the general public or even the media.

The publication of the document now raises several questions for immediate consideration. In the first place, since prima facie cases have been established against all three former mayors of the corporation, steps must be taken, without undue delay, to make them face the court. If found guilty, exemplary punishment should be meted out to them.

A large number of people who were appointed on political grounds, in violation of the established rules and procedures, are certain to lose their positions, if they have not already suffered the fate. Here, the authorities must use their discretion in deciding if some of these employees, those whose appointments were not political, can save their jobs or if they can be regularised.

By far the most important challenge facing the government is to ensure that there are no more irregularities in the administration of the Dhaka City Corporation, under the new set-up. Being an autonomous body, it is relatively free to do things which would not be permitted in any government department or a ministry, a situation where a mayor is often tempted to use his (or her) freedom to a much greater extent than expected. Here, the answer lies in the setting up of a system of accountability, financial checks and balances and finally in the establishment of internal and audit networks on a regular basis. It is also important that the office of the mayor — in fact, the entire DCC administration — should be freed from political influences and control of the ruling party. A mayor must not think of his position in the Corporation as a stepping stone for reaching out to higher political positions in life. Here, the civic-mindedness should serve as the best safeguard for the mayor against ambition — and greed.

Trawler Workers' Strike

The indefinite strike by trawler workers, now in its seventh week, has been passing almost unnoticed. Whether the quiet — and indeed at times cool — response to the issue has something to do with the actual incident, taking place in sea far removed from the busy capital, is not definitely known. Neither is it possible to determine if the nonchalance with which the issue is being treated finds its relation to the fact that it does not directly affect, in any way, life in the capital or other cities. Or, maybe, there are other means to recoup the small effect the strike leaves on the running of affairs of the state.

Apparently, that is the case. The immediate concerns are not so overriding — like the pressures more organised union workers can exert — as to force the parties involved to sit for a negotiated settlement. But such a simplistic view is highly misleading and can prove immensely damaging. Even cold figures are enough to substantiate the argument in favour of a better deal for the deep sea fishing which, let it be noted, is a cent per cent export-oriented industry. The deep-sea-fishing catch earns as much as Taka 450 crore for the country annually. The loss sustained over the past one and a half months therefore may not be staggering but enough to upset the country's budgetary calculations.

However, as the strike drags on accumulating further losses, it really threatens to cause long-term damages by way of forcing cancellation of contracts with foreign buyers who are not likely to take the whole thing in good grace. Once they have turned away to other sources, it will not be easy to persuade them to come back. Foreign buyers do not like parties responsible for breach of contracts and also unreliable markets. On these counts, the country stands to lose not just money alone but reputation as well. Both of which the country needs so much.

The fact that some trawler owners have come to a negotiated settlement with their employees almost conclusively proves that the problem is not beyond solution. Intransigence on either of the parties will only make the problem more complicated. The government, although not a direct party in the whole fray, has no less a role to play in the matter. As already reported, Thai fishing boats have been intruding in our territorial water, taking advantage of the situation. Government interference in both these matters is necessary to, first, solve the dispute between the owners and workers of trawlers; and second, to keep our exclusive economic water zone free from plundering by foreign vessels.

Nation can fight against the realities of its geography. Neither the basic policies of a nation-state be determined by emotions only. The blunt truths and the hard realities must be accepted as the starting point before we could proceed on the path of economic growth and social development and from a least developed (LDC) turn ourselves into a newly industrialising country (NIC).

Except for a small border running for a stretch of less than 300 kilometres, we are surrounded on three sides by India which is 8 times our size in population, 15 times in area, and 20 times in total GDP. This is a reality which we must accept.

It is true that not to speak of Bangladesh, no nation would always appreciate the existence of an overwhelmingly large neighbour right across its frontiers and practically on all sides. But what we can do. This is a geographic reality.

Such instances of overwhelmingly large neighbouring country are not rare in the world. Mexico and USA, Benelux countries and Germany, Poland and Russia are in similar situations. The best example is perhaps that of Mongolia straddling between Russia and China.

There are no inherent disadvantages in the existence of a giant neighbour. In fact, it could be a source of immense potential for economic growth and development. The best example in this respect is that of Hong Kong which flourishes as a separate economy primarily due to trade, business and re-export opportunities originating in mainland China. Because of the complementarities and advantages generated by Hong Kong's unique economic existence as a separate economy so long, that even after 1997 when Hong Kong will be merged with China, the former will continue to maintain its separate economic status. This is an instance of prudent management when hard economic realities have overcome the political limitations.

Instead of fighting against its geographic realities, Hong Kong has exploited the economic advantages bestowed

Geographic Realities: Potentials for Economic Growth

automatically by the existence of the giant neighbour. Same is the case with Taiwan and China. Trade and economic cooperation between them is flourishing in spite of the fact that they do not officially even recognize each other. The battle-ready situation on the border between North and South Korea also changed recently and they have recognized the value of economic cooperation. Millions of Mexicans are now employed in labour intensive industries whose products are sold across the frontier in the United States markets.

Harmony: Economic Advantage

We have to seek harmony and not only live in peace with our geographic realities but try to secure the economic advantages of India being our neighbour. Let us forget politics, the communal tensions and conflicts of the past; simply because it would not bring forth more food, shelter or clothing. We should be ashamed of the fact that in spite of our boasts about the past splendours of the subcontinent and our claim to preeminence in art and literature, India is a downright poor country and Bangladesh continues to be the least developed.

Let us not only recall what we were; we must be aware of what we are. Let us be pragmatic, take stock of the prevailing situation and try to maximise the economic gains for both of us. First is the locational advantage. The entire north-east region of India comprising Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura can conduct their international trade much more efficiently through the ports of Bangladesh. Not only that, if the road, river and railway routes through Bangladesh are utilised, then cost of transportation for all goods and services as well as passenger traffic between north-east and

rest of India will be reduced.

Apart from north-east India, if the Ruppa railway and road bridge is constructed, then a part of the import and export trade of northern India could be channelled through Mongla Port, in order to relieve congestions of Calcutta Port. Inevitably, trade would be more efficient, and indeed cheaper for India; and Bangladesh would benefit from the huge load of cargo movements through its territory as well as the use of its ports. This is the locational advantage of Hong Kong in relation to China and of Singapore in the midst of the ASEAN countries. Bangladesh is ideally located to promote the trade of both north-east and eastern India.

in the world. Scandinavian countries regularly supply electricity down south to other West European countries. Laos sells such hydel power to Thailand. Earlier in this column, I already proposed supply of natural gas to India through pipelines across Jamuna. It may be recalled that in spite of the cold war, Russia has been supplying such natural gas to France for the last 20 years. I also suggested earlier that cement plants may be established based on limestone in Meghalaya. In exchange offer the state free access of its temperate fruits, orange in particular, to Bangladesh market. It is not widely known that after 1947 the economy of the Indian

of economic success. It is a well established strategy in the world today. Both India and Bangladesh are pursuing liberalisation policies. Increasing economic cooperation between India and Bangladesh should be considered entirely within this liberal economic framework. As a consequence, jute, the golden fibre of Bengal might stage a comeback. Both in quality and cost of production. Bangladesh has a distinct competitive advantage in the production of jute. Consequently, Indian import of jute from us while switching over to other crops in West Bengal and Assam is a proposition entirely in line with economic efficiency as well as general economic well being.

Liberal Economy: Success

What should happen in a totally free trade regime between India and Bangladesh? Anyway, this will not affect the growth of our textile industry. This is because textile is a highly differentiated industry. While several varieties of Indian sarees use to be smuggled into Bangladesh, at the same time, there are varieties like Jamdani which enjoy a ready market in India. Above all, if our textile cannot compete with India, consumers cannot be denied better products at lower prices. Days of import substitution through tariff protection are over. We must compete and not only survive but flourish. And it is not only Jamdani. Indian textile industry is practically confined to cotton. We can promote the synthetic or mixed fabric production as well as silk. Above all in spite of large scale smuggling of Indian sarees in particular, or handloom industry not only survived, under pressure of competition it has improved in quality and design. No doubt there is an irrational consumer preference for Indian sarees. I was told

From LDC to NIC by Shahed Latif

Further, power or electricity shortage is a vital constraint to the development of north India. Load shedding is an agonizing reality for Calcutta. Given the existence of the east-west inter connector, Bangladesh now enjoys the benefit of one single national power grid. It could be easily connected to Indian power grid and thereby can eliminate the problem of load shedding in West Bengal. Not only that, the huge hydel power potential of north-eastern states e.g. Arunachal, could be transferred to the northern Indian power grid through Bangladesh. Gas and oil have been discovered in Agartala area. It could be economical to generate power utilizing the natural gas and feed it to the Unified Indo-Bangladesh power grid. Construction of the second east-west inter connector, maybe a third across the river Jamuna, will be highly feasible in order to export and re-export electricity.

Such inter-country transfers are nothing new or novel

districts adjoining Mymensingh and Sylhet were ruined because orange used to be the cash crop sold to consumers in Bangladesh area. It was no longer possible except through smuggling after 1947.

Today concentrated orange juice is a multi-billion dollar trade in the world market and Brazil is the leading world exporter to the major markets in North America, Japan and Western Europe. Orange cultivation in the north-east Indian states can be revived in a vigorous manner and orange juice exported through Chittagong Port to all over the world while fresh oranges can be sold all over Bangladesh.

Bangladesh should sell her low quality tea to India, of course at the world price which would enable India to sell its high quality tea abroad. As a result, Bangladesh would gain in terms of easy and stable market of tea while India maximise its export earnings from tea.

A true liberal economy, fully exposed to competition and efficiency is the *sine qua non*

that by certain Dhaka shopowners that often sarees woven in Bangladesh are stamped made in India to attract the buyers.

Irrational pronouncements on the part of politicians are often emotionally satisfying but provide no alternative policy directive. Police actions and regulatory measures are not the answer to economic maladies. Problems are to be solved. Well thought out schemes and economic counter-measures are necessary under sustainable, liberal competitive conditions.

Economic growth envisages very rapid expansion of trade and business development. This is what will happen on both sides of the border if the suggestions given above are followed through by all concerned. Let us not wait any longer. Let us recognise our geographic realities and act now on an immediate basis. People of West Bengal and Assam have been our neighbours for as long as we are living in the land called Bangladesh today. Why can't we act together for mutual benefits?

The geographic reality that I am talking about is the concern not only of Bangladesh but five eastern states of India: West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. It is very important to recognise that Indo-Bangladesh cooperation is a matter of vital concern to all of us. But it is not an all-India affair. Southern part or western India is hardly involved. It is the five states adjoining Bangladesh with whom we have to seek specific economic cooperation for mutual benefits to all of us within the very near future.

Before 1947, in the days of British India, the eastern parts of the sub-continent were the poorest. Today, after almost 45 years, the same situation not only prevails, it might have worsened. Economic disparity between East and West, within the subcontinent has increased.

It is our duty to convince everybody that the only way to reverse the situation is mutual economic cooperation.

Tribalism Threatens the New Dawn in Kenya

by Alan Rake

The new opposition party in Kenya, FORD, has been given an ecstatic welcome by the people, but now it has to face political reality. A squabble for leadership is developing, building tribal pressures among the party's following. Gemini News Service reports on the tensions that threaten to tear apart Kenya's new democracy before it can begin.

THE "second independence" of Kenya has arrived and the new-found opposition has been warmly embraced by the public at large.

Ever since December 10, when opposition was legalized and multi-partyism permitted, the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD) has been flexing its muscles and basking in public approbation.

When President Daniel Arab Moi held his last rally in December, at the famous Kamukunji grounds near Nairobi, he drew a crowd of 5,000, composed mostly of bussed-in schoolchildren. His Kenyan African National Union (KANU) is tired after being in power since independence in 1963.

FORD was finally given permission to hold its first rally on January 10 at Kamukunji, and drew more than 250,000 wildly happy Kenyans, eager to greet the new political dawn. It was a carnival.

People waved branches, danced, applauded and flashed the FORD sign — the tow-fingered Churchillian salute — without danger of arrest by the security police.

Mzee (it means venerable old man) Oginga Odinga was there, more than 80 year old and for two decades the out-cast of Kenyan politics, telling the masses what they wanted so badly to hear. At last a politician was speaking openly about government corruption, the murder of the foreign minister Robert Ouko, and the economic ills of the ordinary people.

"Enough is enough," he said. "Our people have suffered for too long. An end must be put to this bad dream. Democracy and good government must be restored in Kenya."

The country buzzed with the success of the FORD meeting, while the government's KANU party reeled in disbelief. The derided group of dissi-

dents that had stood its ground, risking arrest, detention and continual harassment, had burst into the limelight. For the first time they were given headline treatment in the press and on state-controlled radio and television.

FORD repeated its success in provincial capitals. Another rally drawing almost as many people was held in Machakos, south of Nairobi, and a third was in Mombasa, on the coast.

FORD was an impromptu group of six dissidents who had rebelled against an authoritarian government. It was an unstructured pressure group of like-minded individuals, united in their hatred of the Moi government. No thought had been given to tribal origin.

But government critics accused it of being a coalition of two main parties — the Luo under Odinga's leadership, and the Kikuyu who included former prime minister Munya Waiyaki, former vice-president Josephat Karanja, and former mayor of Nairobi Charles Rubia.

Its troubles began on January 22 when Odinga suddenly declared his interest in the presidency of the party, knowing this would be the stepping stone to the presidency of Kenya. He had barely declared his intention when Kenneth Matiba, the former MP and chairman of Kenya Breweries, still recovering from a year's detention, announced his interest in the same office.

Though Matiba insisted that "tribalism is no longer a factor in the country's politics," he is a Kikuyu and his

challenge was inevitably interpreted in tribal terms. Everyone began discussing an imminent split between the Luo and the Kikuyu in the ranks of FORD.



Oginga Odinga
The venerable old man

At a stormy delegates' conference at the beginning of February, the former Kikuyu MP Kimani wa Nyoi tried without success to get the leadership expanded to give it a better tribal balance. His proposal was rejected.

The next FORD rally, at Kikuyu town, was a chance for most of the main Kikuyu leaders to assure their people that their interests were being looked after.

"We, the Kikuyu people, are many and cannot afford to be sidelined in current politics," Nyoi stated, expressing their fears.

If the Kikuyu are not satisfied, the danger is that they could break FORD ranks. Another Kikuyu member, former vice-president Mwai Kibaki, has already set up his own Democrat Party. It is just a

small Kikuyu grouping at present, but it could provide a magnet for Kikuyus disillusioned with FORD, especially if Odinga wins the forthcoming FORD party presidency elections.

The hasty, unplanned announcements of Odinga and Matiba are now fulfilling President Moi's often repeated predictions that the multi-party system will unleash the forces of tribalism.

Already, other tribes like the Luhya — one of the largest ethnic groups in the country — led by the veteran MP Masinde Muliro, are worried that if they do not reinforce their position in the leadership they will be left out. The maverick, high-profile dissident Martin Shikuku is a Luhya and he too may want to make a bid for power.

And meanwhile KANU ministers, at first bowled over by the wave of defections to FORD, are regaining their confidence, sitting back and waiting for FORD to tear itself apart.

One minister, Elijah Mwangale, has been telling his Luhya people that FORD is simply a Luo-Kikuyu alliance and that they will be marginalised.

FORD is a party overflowing with talent. All the committed, opinionated lawyers, churchmen, journalists, women's leaders, youth leaders and businessmen who had the courage to stand up for what they believed in have been thrown pell-mell into a new and disorganised party. Not all will be satisfied in the political squabbles that lie ahead.

OPINION

Mosquito, DCC, 'Pied Piper'

Hamelin was a town like Dhaka with a municipality long, long ago. That town's municipality had failed in controlling rats comparable to our Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) failing to control the mosquitoes. In the distressing circumstances, the Pied Piper appeared before the city fathers with his flute. He struck a deal with the astonished city fathers who readily agreed to his terms and conditions. And who doesn't know the latter part of the story that the Pied Piper disappeared with all the rats only to re-appear to claim his remunerations but the city fathers backed out of their commitment and in his anger, the Pied Piper spelt an unforgettable disaster to the people of that town...

As the mosquito menace is last escalating, to the extreme suffering of the citizens and utter "helplessness" of DCC, sudden emergence of a 'Pied Piper' one fine morning in the office of our mayor, cannot be ruled out as the "last resort" although wishful. However, it remains to be seen whether he would carry a flute or a specially made Foggy Machine. We, however, very strongly believe keeping in view the lesson of the Pied Piper's story that the expected 'Pied Piper' of Dhaka — shall not be betrayed upon successful performance of his task, though one is never quite sure "because the dynamics of a situation" is "hardly appreciated by the people." However, our city father has made an exceptionally frank admission of DCC's failure in controlling the mosquitoes. Therefore chances of violation of the terms and conditions agreed to with the 'Pied Piper' of Dhaka, are little.

The 'Pied Piper of Dhaka' is awaited as a redeemer in respect of the mosquitoes. We may, possibly in the meantime, reflect on the mosquito problem. Times has changed dramatically. In 90's, we are deeply concerned with environmental problems. We should therefore examine the mosquitoes and the mosquito coils to find out which of the

two is more hazardous to the public health from the environmental viewpoint.

The population of Dhaka is said to be around 7 million. Assuming that one mosquito coil (without proper quality control) burns the whole night for an average number of 7 persons then about one million mosquito coils burn in closed rooms in Dhaka city alone per night! Slums are included in this calculation because, the mosquitoes bite the slum dwellers, too. In the process by inhaling the smoke of the mosquito coils, the entire population mentioned above, turn into passive smokers in closed rooms space at night.

The chemicals used in the manufacture of mosquito coils are indeed no 'vitamin' ingredients and as such perhaps, no better than the nicotine of tobacco. This therefore, places an additional responsibility on the anti-smoking campaigners, environmentalists etc.

The figure of mosquito coil (passive) smokers shall exceed in density if examined on the basis of municipal holdings within the city as per list of taxable holdings maintained by DCC. The number of mosquito coils burnt in Dhaka city alone in that event, shall cross one million mark, roughly arrived at.

From reports published in the newspapers, we find the problem arising out of the failure to conduct the larvicide spray on time. This failure should be checked, in a down-to-earth analysis keeping in view the production and marketing of the mosquito coils. By manipulating the market forces, the tiny insects have also succeeded in protecting their younger generation against annihilation by larvicide spraying because unlike that insecticide, the mosquito coils with all the public health problems, do not kill the mosquitoes. They only drive them away temporarily.

Our redeemer, the 'Pied Piper of Dhaka' is therefore our last hope against the mosquitoes! Will he come?

Gholam Mohammad North Shahjahanpur, Dhaka

To the Editor...

Public trial

Sir, A committee stated as "Coordinators Committee for Annihilation of the Killers and Collaborators of 1971" has recently been formed with a view to arrange a public trial of Mr Golam Azam on 26th of March, 1992. Dhaka Varsity Teachers' Association has also approved the proposed trial. And processions in favour and against are already in the street.

The matter is of great concern. In a country like ours where a democratic government is in power and the rule of law has not yet totally disappeared, where a neutral personality like Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed is holding the post of the Chief Justice, the thought of a public trial for a rejected man is rather unthinkable and inconsistent with the norms and principles

even of the Liberation War. Moreover, the trial is scheduled to be held on a sacred day which is also not a mark of showing respect to the Shahid martyrs.

Under the circumstances we suggest that the plan of "Public trial" may be dropped and the matter specifically be placed before the court of Justice to avoid any unnecessary troubles. We want to rebuild the nation and be in peace, not to decide it and remain in distress.

Md Abdul Latif Khalifa
Super, PHE, Jessore

Shab-i-Qadr holiday

Sir, Ramadan Moon not having been sighted anywhere in Bangladesh before Friday 6.3.92 Holy Ramadan began on

7.3.92 and accordingly Thursday 2.4.92 becomes the 27th day of Ramadan (Shab-i-Qadr). In the list of holidays approved by Government 2.4.92 is a working day, which should now be declared a holiday.

As many people working in the city, in order to celebrate the Eid-ul-Fitr festival at their village home, require prior booking and other arrangements, it is accordingly requested that the Government decision in the matter may be declared as early as possible.

A. Sattar Pradhan
Srinagar, Gazaria, Dhaka.

An Irish Tragedy

Sir, May I, through your columns, voice my warmest thanks to the writer "A

Bideshi", of the letter entitled "An Irish Tragedy" published in your daily on March 17.

This year I am celebrating my 50th year as a teacher, and 45 of those years have been here in Bengal — in all its names and phases. Needless to say, how depressed I felt in reading the second editorial of your newspaper.

I thank you for publishing the letter of "A Bideshi". It is an honest gesture by you. No human conscience, court, or tribunal can negate the truth that to murder a foetus is in any religion a serious crime.

Please God, why didn't one of my own former students write that letter instead of "A Bideshi"? My 45 years here would then have borne fruit.

Brother Hobart, c. s. c.
St. Gregory's School
Luani Bazar, Dhaka.