

Rao Faces Credibility in Running the Government

A Sensible Call

Political leaders in our subcontinent speak more sense when out of office than when they occupy power. They of course make up for their temporary good sense by forgetting what they have said once the reigns of power are back in their hands. The only consolation being that they at least say it. A case in point is Benazir Bhutto's recent statement calling upon both India and Pakistan to reduce their arms spending. Both countries have just made public their defense budgets and in both cases it was marked by sharp increases — 7 per cent in the case of India and 8.4 per cent in the case of Pakistan. In an interview published yesterday in the weekend magazine of this paper Lord Ennals of the United Kingdom expressed his concern about the rising defense spending in the developing countries. The Executive Director of UNICEF Mr James P. Grant in a similar interview published earlier was more specific when he said that arms race between India and Pakistan recorded the highest rise since the worldwide trend towards reduction on armament build up, following the end of the Cold War.

Pakistan is at an important crossroads in its history. More than a decade of military rule under Ziaul Huq gave away to democratic government, which has now come to rest in the hands of the former Punjab Chief Minister Mr. Nawaz Sharif. It is popularly thought that Mr. Sharif needs to keep the army in good humour and as such he cannot cut the military budget. India, on the other hand, has had no military dictatorship to contend with. However, it was run by a dynasty that to a large extent stifled new thinking in that vast country. So, Mr Rao in a way represents a chance to come out of the type of defense posture that the Gandhi family had tied India to. Unfortunately, both India and Pakistan instead of taking advantage of the new opportunity, are following the "trodden path" of more military build-up. Quoting Bhutto again, "the problem needs political solution" which has eluded the leaders of the two countries for the past four decades. However, there is one significant difference that perhaps may give peace a chance — the absence of super-power rivalry. Now both Pakistan and India are close to the United States. China has already given strong indication that its border problems with India may take a back seat as they make progress in trade and cultural exchanges. So where is the threat against which India and Pakistan have to arm themselves. Pakistan may get carried away by its recent success in Afghanistan and dream of becoming a regional power. But experience should teach the leaders of Pakistan that such dreams seldom come true and the mere pursuing of it will kill the poor Pakistanis.

So peace is the only way. Statistics show that the subcontinent has the world's highest concentration of the poor, of the illiterate, of the malnourished and the diseased. Such statistics should be enough to shame any self-respecting leaders with the minimum of feeling for the people to move away from military build-up and turn their attention to the solving of the socio-economic problems of their countries. Hopefully we will not have to wait for the current leaders Pakistan and India to be moved out of power for this realisation to dawn on them.

Using One's Own Conduits

In the collapse of the Soviet Union can be seen the vindication of many of the points touted for decades against nationalisation of industry and public sector management of enterprises. We in Bangladesh have been living with the evils of 'lootpaat' of the nationalised enterprises from long before the Soviet collapse and had little to be told about how state ownership alone does not lay golden eggs — all by itself — and, on the contrary, continues to be a constant pain in the neck of national economy.

In the backdrop of the above experiences the story of the debacle of GEM in Chittagong and the impending dangers of the NTL or National Tubes at Tongi gains special poignancy. Their stories belong to a completely different genre than is represented by, say, Adamjee. If in one particular category management failure has bloated redundant workforce relentlessly with modernisation stalled for decades and efficiency, cost-effectiveness and accountability thrown out of the window — in the cases typified by GEM and NTL policy decisions by government at higher levels, and not management problem — have contributed to their gradual undoing.

In the case of the imperiled NTL, as published in Thursday's Daily Star, it is government acting against state interest. And for little understandable political benefit. While the organisation can cater to all of the nation's needs of pipes and tubes and after that even export almost 80 per cent of its capacity production which has always been quite a possibility because of the high quality of its products — government itself has allowed low-quality pipes to be imported liberally and let the market be swamped by those cheap and finally uneconomic and unending imports.

One main argument against protection for home products has very validly been based on the fact that this maims local enterprises out of competitiveness — both in terms of price and quality. But, as pointed out in the report, the comparatively higher price for the higher quality NTL products can very well be brought down by the government itself, and as such contribute to their market competitiveness, by cutting on the rates of import duty and sales tax on the raw material for these products.

Government at present is, by its import policy, throwing NTL tubes into competition with low-quality cheap pipes of foreign origin, and by its tax policy, making its own house products expensive and unattractive to buyers.

A sound way to save NTL is to make of it a dynamic and competitive enterprise. Why should a modern and efficient organisation like NTL go waste — paying perhaps for inter-ministerial misunderstanding and lack of co-ordination, which translated into ordinary parlance is nothing more or less than sheer foolishness?

POLITICAL divide in India has deepened. All the three major combinations, the Congress (I) and its allies, the National Front including the communists and the Bharatiya Janata Party, are increasingly pulling apart. The illusion of prime minister Narasimha Rao's consensual approach has shattered, although it was always the line of least resistance on his part. Old issues have come to the fore.

The Bofors gun scandal is back on the anvil. The Congress (I) Party and the opposition have got entangled over it after an acrimonious debate in parliament. Narasimha Rao does not come clean after the disclosure that the note former foreign minister Madhavsinh Solanki gave the Swiss authorities to go slow with investigations was "at the instance of the prime minister". This has damaged his image, and the authority of his minority government has declined further. Still he sees to it that the opposition parties are not provoked to the extent where their anger against him should force them join hands to pull him down.

The embers of the controversy over the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya have got reignited by the Bharatiya Janata Party's declaration that it would build the temple at the site where the mosque was located. Apparently, Narasimha Rao does not want to join issue with the BJP. He has considered it politic to place in the parliament library a report by all parties minus the BJP not to disturb any structure at the disputed site till the court's decision. This has no doubt averted immediate confrontation between the Congress (I)

It is survival that Narasimha Rao seems to be after, not credibility. Punjab and Kashmir, the two running sores, have acquired a new edge, Punjab because of farci-cal elections held and Kashmir because of farci-cal elections sought to be held. The Narasimha Rao Government has no policy either to diffuse the situation or to isolate the separatists.

and the BJP but it has left secular forces confused. The Narasimha Rao government did not take a stand even on the reported threat by Bihar chief minister Laloo Yadav to the life of State chief justice. It would have meant displeasing the Janata Dal which had warned Narasimha Rao against disturbing its government in Bihar. (The Janata Dal has 56 members in the Lok Sabha.)

New Delhi went to the extent of asking the State governor Mohd Shafi Qureshi to deny the interview where he said that he had received the chief justice's letter requesting him for security against the chief minister. Now that the transcript of the interview has appeared in the press, the Narasimha Rao Government has cut a sorry figure.

A similar situation faces the government on the controversy between the Tamil Nadu Assembly and the Supreme Court. Twice the Supreme Court has asked the Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker, M R Muthiah, to stay warrants of arrest against two journalists on the alleged violation of privilege and both times the speaker has rebuffed the Supreme Court. The Centre is a silent spectator because the Narasimha Rao government's survival is on the crucial 17 votes of the AIADMK headed by Tamil Nadu chief minister Jayalalitha. New Delhi could have quetened the matter by referring it to the President who, in turn, could have

invoked Article 143 of the Constitution to seek the Supreme Court's opinion. When a similar matter arose some years ago between the U P State Assembly and the Allahabad High Court, a reference to the Supreme Court under Article 143 settled the controversy.

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Even a demand for more say in the administration is shouted down.

Civil liberty activists and human rights organisations are considered a nuisance, if not unpatriotic. Even the blatant cases of cruelty and illegal detention are not pursued by the government lest the inquiry should 'demoralise' the forces and blunt the instrument on which it has come to depend. The judicial process is so defective that justice is now a commodity that a political

feeling is that if they were not there, India would be a great country.

Corruption has percolated to every level. Politicians have been known for their dubious working but now there are only a handful of officers at the Centre and in the States who can be categorised 'above board'. It is quite telling that in the all-India competitive examination, candidates' first option is 'customs and excise' and the second 'income-tax'.

The elite is cynical and behaves as if it has withdrawn from the system. But it has not stopped appropriating whatever it can do by hook or by crook. The best part of liberalisation for it is the availability of phoren goods in India itself. Unemployment is considered necessary fall-out of the system which has to imbibe speed and scientific methods. The social cost is of little importance because the beneficiary, eight to 10 per cent, are the decision-makers.

One thing that the craze for rapid economic development has done is to push out the basic human element and ethical and spiritual elements of life which are ultimately basic to culture and civilisation and which have given some meaning to life. Were we (Indians) to have all the industrial growth we want and compromise with norms and standards, would we have really advanced?

The various gatherings I have attended throughout the country underline the common desire to solve problems of

poverty and inequality without violence and regimentation. But I can see the people's patience and exasperation reaching the end of the line. They do not want the parliamentary way of government to be scrapped. But they increasingly believe that the elected representatives to parliament and the legislatures have become an integral part of the repressive establishment, particularly in the countryside. Whether it is struggle for land or liberation from the hands of grasping banyans or quick justice in sluggish and costly legal system, the complaint voiced is that the elected representatives are invariably on the side of tyranny and vested interests.

It is lack of faith in the type of the people elected, not in the principle of ballot box. It is becoming more and more clear how money, religion and caste are being used to build 'vote banks' on the one hand and prevent the poor from pursuing common economic interests on the other. The point has been reached where the people have begun to ask whether parliament and state legislatures are worth saving since they have become 'talking shops'. And even if they were saved, what would come out of them?

One thing that all political and other developments have done is to give idealism a bad name. Those who are pursuing it are looked down upon as a group of crazy people. The general tendency is not to talk about idealism. It is as if none has any belief in some cause beyond oneself. Still the nation or its members cannot go far if there is no motive force or selflessness. At times I wonder whether India lacks idealism or ethos.

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Between the Lines

Kuldip Nayar

cal elections held and Kashmir because of farci-cal elections sought to be held. The Narasimha Rao Government has no policy either to diffuse the situation or to isolate the separatists. The gun culture has spilled over to a few more states. Militants, the nationalists (radical communists) and anti-social elements have got so inter-mixed that it is difficult to differentiate between the idle and the idealistic, the mindless and the motivated.

The feeling of insecurity among the people has increased even though there is a liberal use of the para-military and the military. The excesses committed by the two forces, particularly by the first, do not evoke the type of anger it should because they are seen fighting those who are trying to disintegrate the country.

The scene is far worse than before because liberal democracy has already been stumped by the denunciation that it is pseudo-secular in its ethos and that it is an apology for terrorism and separatism. Today even social or economic assertion is labelled as disruptive and anti-national. The poor are an embarrassment and the

boss or a rich tycoon can normally manipulate. Authoritarianism has crept into whatever the government is doing in the name of controlling flippant tendencies. There are numerous instances where the police has been employed to the advantage of the ruling party either at the Centre or in the States. Many officers, particularly from the police, behave as if they are not accountable at all to any public authority.

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The Land of Subtle Apartheid

On TV, Blacks Hardly Figure in a Lily White Nation

WANDER up from the pleasant beachside neighbourhoods to any of this city's sprawling hillside slums, and one inescapable fact becomes apparent: Rio de Janeiro's shantytowns are overwhelmingly home to blacks.

The same observation can be made of many poor neighbourhoods throughout Brazil. So many Brazilians have ancestors in Africa that they are believed to form the second largest black population in the world, after Nigeria. More than half of Brazil's 150 million people are believed to be descendants of slaves.

Yet if their sheer numbers are impressive, the poverty of most Afro-Brazilians, the racism and violence to which they often fall victim, and their almost total exclusion from the country's power structure, are startling.

In its history, Brazil has had only one black federal cabinet minister. No blacks serve in the cabinet of President Fernando Collor. Brazil's Supreme Court has never had a black judge. And only two of Brazil's 81 sitting senators and 33 of its 503 federal deputies are black or mulatto.

Poor black children are by far the most common victims of the notorious death squads hired by businessmen to "clean up" Brazil's streets. A federal inquiry reports that 82 per cent of the 4,611 children killed by death squads between 1988 and 1990 were black.

Blacks make up an estimated 80 per cent of Brazil's prisoners. In a country that commonly allows wealthy whites who hire assassins or embezzle fortunes to walk free, poor blacks convicted of relatively petty crimes are typically thrown into a severely overcrowded prison system that is rife with violence and disease.

A study by Sao Paulo demographer Elza Berquo shows that at least six million women have been sterilised in government and internationally funded programmes. Black leaders say most of these women are black or mulatto. Health activists say they are often not told of less drastic birth control methods, and that they often regret the decision afterwards.

The plight of most Afro-Brazilians has become so des-

perate that some activists believe it is now worse than that of black South Africans.

"At least what they're up against in South Africa is acknowledged in law," says longtime black activist Yedo Ferreira.

"Here in Brazil, our laws say beautiful things, but they're not respected.... There's still a powerful myth that racism doesn't exist in this country. That makes it all the harder to fight."

Afro-Brazilian intellectuals say the explanation for the persistent marginalisation of blacks — despite their numbers and potential political clout — lies in Brazil's peculiar history of race relations and the insidious racism which that legacy has left behind.

Slavery figured prominently in Brazilian life for more than three centuries. Established in 1534, when the first Africans arrived, it was abolished only in 1888 — 25 years after the US and 80 years behind Britain.

Black activist Carlos Alberto Medeiros says one key legacy of the slaving era, "paternalism," has been particularly effective in masking Brazilian racism. Medeiros sums up white Brazilian paternalism with the phrase, "I'm not racist because I kiss my maid."

It is, in fact, common for wealthy whites to hug or kiss their black servants — behaviour which can lead visitors to marvel at Brazil's apparent racial harmony.

Medeiros says such chumminess is usually insincere, although "extremely efficient" in achieving its desired end: poor blacks with no realistic hope of befriending their superiors are misled into believing such friendship may one day exist, and so fall to unite against racial oppression.

Historian Teresa Veloso says paternalism developed in Brazil largely as a result of its pattern of early settlement. Unlike in North America, where entire white families settled, Brazilian colonists were commonly single Portuguese men. Lonely, many of them took black mistresses, who were themselves eager to escape the hardships of slavery.

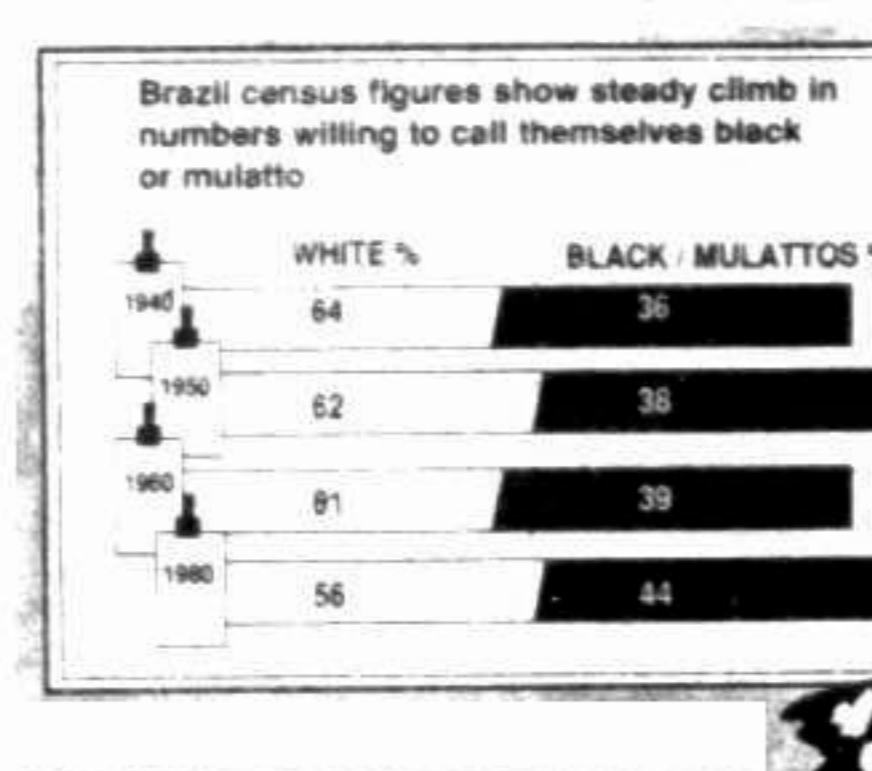
The mulatto children born of such relationships typically

Alexander Norris writes from Rio de Janeiro

In one and a half weeks Brazil is the venue for the Earth Summit — the top-level international conference that aims to plan action to save the global environment.

Canadian journalist Alexander Norris is already in Brazil to cover the conference for Gemini News Service, which has long given special coverage to environmental problems across the world. Before raising the curtain on the summit (June 3-14), Norris has been looking at the host country, which has the second largest black population of any nation.

Colour in Brazil Censuses



BENEDITA DA SILVA - Future mayor of Rio?

grew up with confused allegiances. Often unacknowledged by their white fathers, they nonetheless became dependent on them for 'favours'.

Modern Brazil's unevenly distributed wealth — one of the most lopsided in the world — testifies to how little things have changed since slavery.

class, which owes its origins largely to the strict competitions set up to regulate entry into Brazil's civil service. As the public sector expanded, says Medeiros, such tests allowed blacks to overcome the racism they faced elsewhere.

The mass media play a key role in sustaining Brazilian racism. Reaching the vast ma-



majority of homes, Brazilian TV bombards viewers with the image of a lily white nation in which blacks rarely figure — and then almost always in stereotyped roles as criminals, servants, athletes or musicians.

Faced with such a powerful barrage of racially-infused messages, many Brazilians, particularly poor and lower-

middle class people of mixed race, choose to deny their African heritage.

It is not uncommon even for Brazilians who have African origins to speak ill of blacks. And it is often considered impolite to describe someone as "black". Euphemisms such as "tanned" or "dusky-skinned" are preferred.

Despite the gloomy situation faced by most blacks, attitudes may slowly be changing. For the first time, three of Brazil's 26 state governors are black. And in 1986, voters in Rio de Janeiro elected Workers' Party candidate Benedita da Silva to Congress.

Silva's campaign urged voters to elect "a black, a woman, and a slum-dweller." She has since become an outspoken black-rights advocate in Congress and is touted as a future mayor of Rio.

Poverty, however, leaves most blacks little time to mobilise against racism. And black movements, dominated by the middle class, are politically divided. In a deeply racist country that requires its aspiring politicians to have access to huge political war chests, it is difficult for blacks to win power through elections.

"What we need to do now," says sociologist Otair Fernandes de Oliveira, "is to make black people proud of their origins, so the boy in the slum will no longer be ashamed he's black, so the little black girl will no longer grow up wishing she had blonde hair. It's a task that will take generations."

OPINION

Bosnia-Herzegovina : Peaceful Solution

The Turkish public opinion is deeply shocked and alarmed by the recent tragic events in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Hundreds of civilians already lost their lives, thousands have been wounded and hundred thousands of innocent people became refugees in their own country. The so-called Yugoslav National Army (JNA) is now openly participating in the fighting, bombing the capital town of Sarajevo from the air and shelling it from the mountains. The President of the Republic Mr. Alija Izetbegovic was the hostage of Sarajevo. A member of EC monitoring mission was killed. Humanitarian aid can not be dispatched as JNA and the paramilitary Serbian forces are blocking all access to the country. Historical and religious buildings and monuments are systematically destroyed. What has been done in Croatia is now being repeated in Bosnia-Herzegovina. If the international community will not be able to secure an immediate end to the violence, the civilian population may face starvation and epidemics.

suffering from the policies followed by their leaders, both in Sarajevo and Belgrade. We also believe that Serbian people do not deserve such an international isolation and condemnation. Extremist policies of the former communist and newly nationalist leaders of Serbia, compounded by the brutal behaviour and acts of violence of the para-military Serbian forces and the JNA defy the very essence of the international law. Furthermore they spread seeds of hatred among the peace-loving nations of the Balkans. Despite several cease-fire agreements, killings of the civilians and large-scale destruction of towns and villages continue unabated. The so-called Yugoslav National Army is still striving to impose its will of a divided Bosnia-Herzegovina with Serb supremacy.

Unless Belgrade formally recognizes the former republics of Yugoslavia, and clearly honours the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity of those states, it is bound to be seen by the whole world as an aggressor persisting in secessionist policies carried out by arms and violence. The open involvement of the so-called JNA in the hostilities during last week, further aggravates the responsibility of Serbian leaders,

Indiscriminate bombing of Sarajevo and other towns and wanton acts against religious and cultural heritage violates the minimal norms of civilized behaviour.

Consequently we believe that the international community should exert pressure over Belgrade to stop violence immediately. The JNA should either be submitted to legitimate Bosnian governmental authority or be withdrawn from Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Unhindered communications and transport facilities should be established quickly to extend humanitarian assistance to the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

All problems arising from the disintegration of former Yugoslavia should be dealt with in appropriate fora through dialogue and negotiation.

While expressing our deepest sympathy for all victims of this tragedy, we call upon all parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations and individuals to join us in asking Serbian leaders in Belgrade to agree with the basic demands presented to them through the channels of the CSCE in Helsinki, aiming at a peaceful solution of the Bosnia crisis.

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Ali Dincer, MP
The Turkish Grand National Assembly, Ankara.

To the Editor...

Aquatic environment

Sir, I went through the news item — "Earth Summit: Dhaka likely to propose for special fund" published in your daily of May 13 with great interest. I was somewhat appalled to find that none has been included in the government delegation to represent fisheries and aquatic environment of the country. Aquatic environment and ecosystems are an integral part of the overall environment. How could this escape the minds of the relevant authorities of the government?

Dr M Youssof Ali
Moghbazar, Dhaka

Bangladeshi aliens

Sir, London's Tower Hamlet authorities "denied prayers for housing of 100 Bangladeshi families on the plea that illegal immigrants cannot receive benefits from the public funds," but High Court of England has instructed Tower Hamlet authorities to treat those Bangladeshi "equal to other families until Home Secretary declares them illegal immigrants."

According to the police of the Environment Ministry, the local authorities have to arrange housing facilities for those who become homeless "not for their own fault".

The immigration problems

faced by the foreigners often root in the very first steps towards going abroad that may lead to complications in the alien's situation culminating in uncertain future.

"Since" "everybody makes mistakes", many innocent aliens are not likely to escape the unfortunate harassments from their errors of officials.

With the new world order in progress, nobody should take "might is right" for granted so long as human rights are respected, no matter where. Besides, a lesson-learned may not be all that good to a victim of other's fault.

M Rahman
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