

Alternative Energy Sources

A seminar on alternative energy sources, held last Tuesday, has given us a timely call to put our heads together to determine what we should do about long term energy planning.

All these ideas are extremely valuable and are worth serious consideration by the government. But two that we particularly welcome are the suggestion for greater emphasis on solar energy and bio-mass energy.

As for the biomass as an energy source we can learn a lot from China and India. In addition to being a renewable source of energy, it has the additional advantage of being produced from animal and human waste that nouseate our environment at the moment.

There is another proposal made in the seminar that we would like to wholeheartedly support. That is going for far more efficient use of the existing sources of energy.

We also welcome the decision of the government to open up the energy sector to private investment. But to attract private resources in this area the government will have to first ensure a very clear energy policy.

As has been suggested by the experts, Bangladesh must launch a vigorous search for alternative energy resources. To be able to do so, we need a very clear and transparent energy policy.

Sit-in by Celebrities

The radio and television celebrities, together with hundreds of lesser mortals of the electronic media world, on Monday staged a sit-in in front of the Television Bhawan at Rampura.

Many in the crowd that participated in the demonstration can be universal agreement be called the best products of our nation in the present times.

There is no escaping the unpleasant fact that as far as the government-controlled radio and television are concerned, there has been no change from the autocratic times of the Ershadian usurpation.

Well then, they are using the electronic media as they think their party and its hold on power would best be served while a coterie of individuals continue to steal prime-time projection — the whole being repeat exercises in counter-productivity.

It is almost two years that the radio and TV artists had presented the then young government of Begum Zia with a paper that would help set the radio and the TV on the autonomy path.

Pakistan yet to Recover from a Martial Law Culture

POLITICS knows no forgiveness. Otherwise, the winner Nawaz Sharif, after the National Assembly was restored by the Supreme Court of Pakistan, and the rebuffed President Ghulam Ishaq Khan would have started afresh, letting bygones be bygones.

But the moment Nawaz Sharif reassumed power he said that the repeal of the eighth amendment was "high on the political agenda."

What is right may not, however, be politic or at least not opportune. In the rush of effusive slogans of victory, Nawaz Sharif has forgotten that it is a troika that rules Pakistan.

True, the 8th amendment is an arbitrary source of power, a factor of instability in Pakistan's political system. But this was not the time when Nawaz Sharif should have joined issue with the president.

The tradition set by Ghulam Mohammed, then prime minister, of handing over power to the army — General Ayub Khan was the army chief at that time — has not yet gone out of fashion. . . . General Mirza Aslam Beg, former Pakistan army chief, has given a timely warning by expressing fears about eventual army intervention if the contending politicians are unable to work out their differences.

Bhutto's long march and Nawaz Sharif's demonstrations in the wake of dismissal, the people saw a poetic justice — and relief — in the Supreme Court's judgment. They wanted peace.

The president also did not rise above the discomfiture of defeat in the Supreme Court. His ardent supporters, the provincial heads in Sind and Punjab, were conspicuous by their absence when Nawaz Sharif visited the states after becoming prime minister once again.

Punjab appears to have proved the proverbial last straw on the camel's back. Nawaz Sharif was justifiably angry over the manner in which the state government of his supporters was bundled out and the assembly members were forced to change their loyalty after his dismissal.

Had Nawaz Sharif stopped

after the Lahore High Court threw out the dismissal order and restored the assembly, things would not have come to such a pass in democracy, particularly when it is at a fledgling stage, discretion is the better part of valour.

Already working on it is a committee which, ironically, was constituted on the proposal by Benazir Bhutto's law minister. Nawaz Sharif should have waited for its recommendations.

His political opponent, Benazir Bhutto, who was also a victim of the eighth amendment when she was dismissed nearly three years ago, has played her cards far better. She had lost considerably in moral stature by appointing some of her Pakistan People's Party (PPP)

willing to stop fighting till December when Ishaq Khan's term expires. That is probably the reason why General Abdul Waheed, chief of the army staff, is reported to have met Ishaq Khan and Nawaz Sharif a number of times in the last few days to emphasize upon them to carry on till December or hold the general elections.

There is a set procedure for that.

men on the Mazari interim government in the wake of Nawaz Sharif's dismissal. However, by not adopting the posture of a confrontist, she has gained some ground. The people do not want to bring down the democratic structure, however rickety, nor do they like to see the army back. Benazir Bhutto, compared to Nawaz Sharif, looks like a person who is trying to find a way out.

Nawaz Sharif has every reason to be irritated over the demand for a fresh poll when he still has half of his five-year term to go. But his demand that Ishaq Khan should also resign does him no credit. In fact, he should seize the opportunity to go back to the electorate and tell them how he was wronged. He can make the abolition of

the eighth amendment as his poll plank, the point on which even Benazir Bhutto has compromised. In an open letter to Nawaz Sharif, she has talked about the redistribution of power between the president and the prime minister. All the power to the prime minister can make him authoritarian and the president of his choice may lead to a fascist rule, Benazir Bhutto has argued. This is not a dilemma for Pakistan alone but the democratic countries world over.

power to the army — General Ayub Khan was the army chief at that time — has not yet gone out of fashion. Vested interests are once again in the field. Curiously, when everyone was looking for Nawaz Sharif after the government's revival, he was offering feteiha at the grave of General Zia-ul-Haq.

General Mirza Aslam Beg, former Pakistan army chief, has given a timely warning by expressing fears about eventual army intervention if the contending politicians are unable to work out their differences. Speaking from experience, he said that the pressure on the army chief was intense. The lobbying in Pakistan in the recent days testifies this.

Unfortunately, over the years we have developed a martial law culture," he has said. There may be a gain of truth in the statement because whenever politicians have tried to break up the system, there has been a cosy feeling among the people that the army will pick up the pieces. Indeed, it does. But every time Pakistan has paid dearly. Will it be different this time?

Left to the army, it would not like to intervene lest it should spoil the professional profile it is beginning to acquire. But if the country can not be governed, as is the impression, what should the armed forces do? Zia had a solution. He would often say that the role of military should be spelt out in the constitution itself, like in Turkey. The armed forces should be able to intervene when things went wrong and return to the barracks after setting them right. The only danger in such an arrangement is that the forces do not go back. Zia ruled for more than 11 years!

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

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TOWARDS A GOOD GOVERNMENT—II

A Viable Local Administration and other Imperatives

by Syed Naqib Muslim

IN Bangladesh, a kind of local bodies could not develop themselves into institutions where the administrators and elected public representatives could be held accountable. Local bodies have been perpetually dependent on the national government and the former have been mere the extension of the latter; they have never been economically self-reliant.

There is another proposal made in the seminar that we would like to wholeheartedly support. That is going for far more efficient use of the existing sources of energy. Account of our system loss in electricity and also that in natural gas are phenomenal. It will be years before we can really think of alternative energy.

We also welcome the decision of the government to open up the energy sector to private investment. But to attract private resources in this area the government will have to first ensure a very clear energy policy, especially in such areas as tax relief and steady pricing.

As has been suggested by the experts, Bangladesh must launch a vigorous search for alternative energy resources. To be able to do so, we need a very clear and transparent energy policy, which the government should bring out without any further delay.

Sit-in by Celebrities

The radio and television celebrities, together with hundreds of lesser mortals of the electronic media world, on Monday staged a sit-in in front of the Television Bhawan at Rampura. This they did to press their demand for autonomy of the two big organisations. At the same time they took the occasion to denounce 'distortion of historic facts and politicisation of the national media' as well as 'nepotism and anarchism that has polluted the environment' in the two organisations.

Many in the crowd that participated in the demonstration can be universal agreement be called the best products of our nation in the present times. When almost all of such performers on the TV and the radio join in such a demonstration — the nation's heart goes with them. Specially as their demand at issue is not so much their own as it is indeed the whole nation's.

There is no escaping the unpleasant fact that as far as the government-controlled radio and television are concerned, there has been no change from the autocratic times of the Ershadian usurpation. In fact, Information Minister Barrister Huda had done one better than the seemingly unbeatable Ershad excesses when he claimed that the two media were government property and it was perfectly right whatever way the owners were pleased to use it. No one better positioned than him either in the party or in the government has as yet come forward to amend the brash statement.

Well then, they are using the electronic media as they think their party and its hold on power would best be served while a coterie of individuals continue to steal prime-time projection — the whole being repeat exercises in counter-productivity. Saturation projection of Ershad only made a nuisance of him to the citizens. When plain sycophancy and at best a jesting buffoon's ways replace principles of truth and fairness, art and honesty in organisations that play with the nation's mind — they unfailingly degenerate into dens of corruption and nepotism of the most despicable kind.

It is almost two years that the radio and TV artists had presented the then young government of Begum Zia with a paper that would help set the radio and the TV on the autonomy path. It is time that government showed some respect to that. It is never a good sign for a government when writers and artists and intellectuals of the nation go unheeded. If the lessons of the post-47 years are hard to recollect, the memories of the late 80s should be enough to make the government give serious thoughts to the issue of autonomy of the electronic media.

participated a five-day training programme: "We are running the parishes on commonsense; now after training I can sense, commonsense is not enough and we should not leave administration to chance or fate. We must acquire skills to administer our people."

REVISION OF LAWS RULES: Politicians, bureaucrats and citizens commonly believe that many of the laws and rules formed by the British rulers in the subcontinent do not meet the requirement of an independent democratic country. As Burke remarks, "Bad laws are the worst form of tyranny."

All the successive governments articulated need for a massive revision of the obsolete rules and laws now in practice in this country; but no government took practical steps to revise the Secretariat Manual, Service Rules and Financial Rules. In most cases, the only word 'Pakistan' has been replaced by 'Bangladesh' keeping intact the colonial spirit. A few provisions of the Government Servants Conduct Rules, 1979, are not consistent with the articles of the Constitution. Official Secrets Act needs thorough revision as a few provisions are not compatible with the tenets of a transparent administration.

As the gravity and diversity of crimes have increased, Penal Codes produced in the colonial time need elaborate revision. With the change in the form of government, the Rules of Business requires comprehensive modification.

SIMPLIFICATION OF FORMS: Simplification of forms and modernization of legal vocabulary constitute an important area of intervention for the government. Our administrators have become modern in dress, food, office-room decoration etc. but they are yet to become modern in the technology of administration. While the whole

world is striving for simplification of the office procedures for saving time, they have still retained the old, cumbersome and complicated procedures in the administration. For instance, the purchase procedures are such that government is constantly losing money for buying things at a much higher rate than the market prices because of the unscientific tender procedures prescribed by the British masters who never anticipated the art of manipulation practised by the Bangladeshi businessmen. Still today, a Class I government servant needs to put at least 10 signatures to draw his monthly salary. However, simplification of procedures is a means to achieve transparency in administration.

Forms of official correspondences are out-dated; language is full of clichés, trite expressions, fuzies and redundancies. Archaic expressions like "it is needless to mention that", "for the purpose of", "in connection with", "aware of the fact that", "your obedient servant", "with due respect and humble submission" are not only redundant but also tiresome. Information/ideas/facts are expressed in a round-about way. In the Western countries, language of laws/rules and official communication is so plain, specific and direct that even a school-boy can comprehend

them. It is interesting and ironical that the British had taught our administrators a kind of parlance or terminology which they themselves did not use in their own country. All these merit immediate intervention so that we no longer become the laughing stock to the foreigners or even to the educated citizenry of this country. We have therefore to bring reform in our administrative vocabulary as well.

FORMULATION OF JOB DESCRIPTION: The majority of the members of the public hold the view that the administration in Bangladesh can be characterized by delay, procrastination, evasion, confusion, non-responsiveness, buck-passing and scapegoating. This situation can be handled by a provision of proper role definition, clear delegation of authority and device of accountability. There are many government offices where job descriptions of employees are not available. Formulation of a book of job description with well-defined delegation of authority is an immediate requirement for all the government offices.

One of the reasons of the low confidence of the public in the administration is that the proper persons are not in the proper place. Appointment, posting and deputation (APD) should be based strictly on competence, commitment, aptitude and training background. It is often found that incompetent persons are appointed to the important posts by the political parties in power on the plea of the exercise of the political will. This ultimately proves boomerang to them. Therefore, clear principles or guidelines should be set to prevent favouritism, nepotism and arbitrariness regarding APD.

REDUCTION OF WASTE

Waste of resources and time is endemic in almost all government offices. Waste is, in fact, the other name for inefficiency and the price of administrative inefficiency is too heavy for a poor country like Bangladesh to afford. Therefore, one of the prime purposes of the government's efforts may be to minimize waste. If the affluent countries of the Western world spend each penny in a prudent way, why should we as one of the poorest nations of the world indulge in luxury, waste and extravagance? Austerity, economy and efficiency — these should be internalized as the core administrative values.

One of the sources of administrative waste is duplication or redundancies in the government agencies or public enterprises. It is often observed that almost similar or marginally diverse functions are performed by two different agencies with huge personnel systems. For instance, BIWTC and BIWTA are performing almost similar functions or at least interdependent roles; these agencies may be merged into one agency to minimize administrative cost and problem of coordination. Thus a planned reorganization of some government agencies is required to reduce waste in the administrative sector.

Another way to reduce waste of resources is to devolve some of the governmental functions on the private bodies or the NGOs with provisions of accountability. The government can draw a defined domain of responsibility on the basis of role negotiation.

OFFICE AUTOMATION: Money saved from waste minimisation can be utilized for computerization and automation of the government offices. Computerization will considerably reduce unnecessary paperwork and save time and in this way efficiency of administration

will be tremendously improved. Today an officer suffers from 'paperphobia' as piles of files accumulate everyday on his table. He naturally tends to remove files from his table simply by jotting a pet phrase "please discuss" for a temporary relief. As files grow and papers multiply, space and environmental problems emerge. This does not, of course, mean that I am in favour of total elimination of paper-work; paper-work is unavoidable because of record-keeping and documentation. Record-keeping is essential because some men may die and some may lie; records testify their word and deed. Therefore, computer literacy and computer use should be made compulsory for the officers at all levels to enable them to enjoy the benefits of information technology. It is often found that some officers tend not to use computers and get the things done by the junior officers although their offices are equipped with computers. However, wide practice or use of information technology will not only promote efficiency but also bring transparency in the administration.

Recommending is not implementing; in fact, success of good reforms lies in their implementation.

Recommendations of earlier reforms commissions looked good more on paper than in practice. Reforms of ARC, 1993 will be meaningful if its recommendations are doable and they meet the needs of the administrators and the administrated alike. Let us hope that the ARC comes up with a set of pragmatic recommendations in the light of the politico-economic and socio-cultural realities of Bangladesh to fulfill our dream of establishing a good government which is incorruptible, transparent and accountable.

Concluder!

The writer is a Deputy Director, BPATC, Savar, Dhaka and a member of the BCS (Admn)

To the Editor...

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.

Homage to Bangabandhu

Sir, Your editorial of the 15th of August deserves high praise. It really reflects of bipartisan view and confirms your paper reflecting the opinion of the people of Bangladesh who do not fall under any party guideline. The issue of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has been made a political one and taken out of proportion making an unnecessary division in our country.

The contribution of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for Bangladesh and its creation is unquestionable. At the time of our emergence as a nation his leadership was the most dynamic one. Although he was the head of Awami League, with the establishment of Bangladesh he became the leader of the nation.

Water supply

Sir, Since February water supply in Shiddheswari, Fakirapool, Eskaton, Naya Paltan, etc. has become so low that under-ground reservoir remains nearly dry. The result

is no water in the household to manage daily washing. While this meagre supply of water persists, there seems to be an air of apathy with the WASA and others who sit on "conditionalities" imposed on bill payees to improve this water supply position. While it is the duty of a citizen to pay the bill for services rendered (says PDB), why should a citizen be asked to pay for no services? Our hope is for continuous satisfactory services by the WASA, PDB, T&T, Municipality, and all other service centres/establishments.

While the water-supply crisis persists, a programme to install a new pump is reported to be at hand. But the reality seems to be the case of, at least as of now, despair. The idea — only an idea — is with the planning section of the WASA. As we all have some taste of planning cases, it is all a matter of time, long time till it sees the light at the end of a tunnel.

Next in line of water-supply is the WASA's water-carrying trucks. They ply on cash payment. But do they ply? First hand information is that a number of these trucks — they

don't have a lot of them — are idling for quite some time. A few of these trucks — dilapidated ones, no light, faulty clutch-plates and electric wiring, etc. — can hardly cope with the pressing calls of consumers. Even if they do, you need to whisper in the ears of mighty drivers of trucks to deliver water at your water hungry residence. When you dig deep to know the plight of these expensive water carrying trucks idling, you actually discover, the repairing attempts are a kind of subterfuge for milch-cow! How many times are these trucks repaired, and yet they remain idle for want of repair?

Areas hit with water crisis have their roads and lanes dug up to lower water borne pipe line in order to collect few drops of it in the underground reservoir. The outlook of these roads and lanes gives one an impression of bombed out holes and debris all around. There is none to check it or to repair to even out the surfaces of these roads/lanes. Apparently, this is the fallout of water crisis endangering traffic mobility.

Finally, to say the least, one may go without electric light,

telephone, but not without water. In the sphere of responsibility, they all talk, but there is lingering complacency. They all like to have promotions in Public Service, and, therefore, they should promote welfare of public to ameliorate sufferings of people.

Hassan Sharif
Bara Moghbaraz, Dhaka

FAP and the Mississippi flood

Sir, This refers to Behind the Headlines report "FAP Undergoes a Series of Changes" by Masud H Khan (6 August). From the very beginning of the FAP the FPCO hardly heeded to any second opinion about strategies of flood mitigation in Bangladesh and had cast a blind eye to the views expressed in the Report of the Task Force on the FAP prepared during the period of the Interim Government of Justice Shahabuddin. Many FPCO members in fact made oblique comments about the views expressed by the members of the Task Force. In this connection, this is what Mr M H Siddiqui heading the FPCO

had to say, about those having second opinion on flood control, at the FAP-19 seminar held on 12 November, 1992: "The 1988 floods not only gave birth to FAP, it opened Pandora's box. Hundreds of thousands of wise men emerged to say something about floods. Those who hardly knew floods, who have never seen rural Bangladesh, who are totally ignorant about the farmers' life, have something to say, and are writing books..."

Would experts like Mr Siddiqui read some few more books now to learn about flood as it has happened in the USA? Within a week, the Mississippi flood has breached the much quoted engineering feat of the most technologically advanced country of the world and engulfed nearly 20,000 sq. miles causing damages worth more than \$100 billion. We would like to hear from the exponents of embankment Bangladesh rivers about what they think of such a disaster of embankment failure in future in our country. Don't they think that there are something to learn from the Mississippi tragedy? Dr K Moudood Elahi
Jahangirnagar University.