

How to Provide Everyone with Shelter

By the time this leader is published, the members of the cabinet might have a look at the draft of a National Housing Policy (NHP) prepared by a group of experts. According to a report published in this newspaper yesterday, the policy is expected to be made available to the public by the first week of the next month. As outlined in the report, the NHP, marking a major departure from the conventional pattern, proposes to cover all strata of society, with a particular emphasis on low and middle-income groups. Even more ambitious is the plan to give high priority to the task of sheltering the disadvantaged, the destitute and the shelterless.

It is premature now to make any authoritative comment on the merits of the proposed policy, but there is no doubt that it is quite high-sounding. That the country needs as much as four million new houses for ensuring shelter for all speaks of the daunting task ahead. According to an estimate, the requirement will cross the five million mark by the year 2000. So far as the policy is concerned, we are happy that the shift from an urban-biased one to the most reasonable has been pronounced in no uncertain terms. Also the priority area has been identified by the experts for reaching the most vulnerable of the society.

All this looks to be a pretty good move, but the crux of the problem lies not so much in enumerating the need but in the way of implementing the policy. Cynics will not take much time to dismiss the policy-package on the ground that such lofty ideas hardly get translated into reality. We, however, will want to know what mechanism the experts have thought of developing for the implementation of the policy. We are dismayed by the fact that the government will have a lesser role in the whole business and the private sector will actually be responsible for bringing about the miracle. Our experiences so far with such initiatives point to the fact that the private entrepreneurs are intent on investing in enterprises with less risk and greater returns.

How the new NSP will get the private sector involved in the job is an intriguing question. If the government plays a promoter's role only, who will provide the huge fund that will be required? Less governance and interference are good only when the society is considerably developed and even the lowest of the low enjoy the basic human rights and the wherewithal to support them. In our case, the situation is particularly dismal as illustrated by the fate of the cluster villages. Housing as a programme alone cannot succeed without other supportive measures. However low-cost housing may be, in the absence of income generation the programme is bound to fall apart. This has exactly happened to the cluster villages.

It is the process of stalking poverty that has to be stemmed. Therefore, we will be interested to know what recipe the policy-package has up its sleeves for remedying the ills. If the government as a signatory of the Rio Conference is just obliging the provisions by formulating a policy, it may not go far. The all-important question still concerns the fund. Mentionably, according to the Rio Conference, it is incumbent upon the governments, who have signed the charter, to provide shelter for the poor. However, if there is a success story regarding housing nearer, we can look up for example at Sri Lanka. Former slain president Jayawardene implemented this enviable programme with astounding success. If we are serious about housing here, we can take a cue from Sri Lanka and boldly stand up to the challenge.

A Sporting Loser

That the Chinese are a great campaigner, even in Western terms, was amply proved by the seesaw battle for the Olympic Summer Games 2000. The end-game of that battle gave the world a chance to know China in an even newer and unexpected light — that of a sporting and great loser.

In fact the Chinese promotional and manipulative blitz in the matter of IOC choosing Beijing for the 2000 Olympics was so compelling that its failure to clinch the Games has saddened not only China but perhaps more than half of the sporting populace of the world.

Beijing's claim to get the millennium Olympic did not rest on her diplomatic adroitness alone. She has in the last Asiad convincingly proved her competence in handling happenings of the size of an Olympic. For the Beijing Asiad had all the trapings and inner organisational strength of an Olympic. And, in the meantime, China has also shown to the world she is indeed one among the sporting superpowers, if specially in the women's events and so also in the men's. It doesn't happen overnight — China gave its body and soul unremittingly for years on end to work the miracle. All for getting the Olympics second time to Asia in the history of the Games.

The pleat that was instrumental in beating all this to naught was not at all a pleasant one — speaking sportingly. Some people in the US took the stand that an Olympic in Beijing would amount to condoning the Tienanmen massacre — an event that has faded well into the mist of times past.

Beijing took care even to neutralise that monstrous image by releasing Wei, the celebrated dissenter. Even so the West, at least an overwhelming majority of them, stuck to spurning the Chinese yearning.

Australians are a great sporting nation. We are not sure how much will the second Olympics on, their soil in less than four decade's time boost the cause of competitive sport, specially athletics, in the down-under. But, by the example of a Powell-leap could the Asian nations take given the chance.

There is no use in conjecturing what could happen if the Swaziland man would not be called back home only after two rounds of balloting, and if there were a tie what would Samaranach do. It is far better to settle for a Beijing Olympics in 2004. That seems to be the mood now in that ancient city. But how can one be so sure about that? Tokyo got the Olympics once but was it as an Asian country? Japan has long been the accepted white country in Asia. Will China be able to de-Asianise herself in the remaining seven years or the perceptions of the industrialised West change to accommodate exotic Cathay?

Hearty and sincere congratulations to the Aussie, specially to the Sydney of that fantastic opera house and harbour. We are sure it will be a great gala show there with much of the honours carried by the Chinese.

OLLING is only days away in Pakistan's third general elections in five years. Yet no clear picture emerges about the prospects of the various parties. The only thing that seems somewhat certain is that voter turnout will be low.

According to one newspaper, the country's civil and military establishments, based on intelligence statements made available to the Election Commission (EC), expect only a 30 per cent turnout. If the forecast is correct, this will be the lowest in Pakistan's electoral history. In 1988 and 1990, the respective figures were 43.1 and 45.5.

Indications on the ground, too, seem to favour such an assumption. There is hardly any sign of the usual pre-election activity in the major cities, at least in Karachi. There are very few or no street corner meetings, rallies and processions, not much of posterizing and wall chalking, as the expression goes.

The EC, in line with the caretaker government's expressed desire to hold free and fair elections, seems to be much more demanding and inflexible than in previous years. It has warned parties and candidates not to violate the code of conduct they have agreed to. And it seems determined to see that violators are punished.

In some other respects also this year's elections are going to be different than earlier years. The caretaker government seems set to ensure that its brief tenure is not blighted by allegations of rigging or other foul-play that normally take place during elections.

Some of the steps that the government have taken to cleanse the administration have had their effect on the elections also. The most conspicuous is the bank loans affair. For the first time, a list of more than

In the past few months, the Indonesian government has shown increasing signs of tolerance of political dissent, relaxing restrictions on some of its most prominent critics.

And when President Suharto made his state of the nation address on the 48th anniversary of the country's independence in mid-August, he even promised a new era of openness.

Differences of opinion will actually serve as a unifying force to arrive at a common consensus which will be more beneficial to the interests of all," he said.

Observers say Indonesia's increasing prosperity may have given the government the confidence to loosen up, but sceptics want to see concrete action to support Jakarta's words.

"We should not be over-optimistic until the government takes some real action to indicate their desire for change," said a political analyst who asked not to be named.

A recent petition to lift the ban on the literary works of renowned writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer is being seen as a major test case for the government.

"We should no longer be

unequivocally admirable chiefly for her feelings for the fellow humans on the same planet.

Human rights situation in American democracy (in which everyone is entitled to freedom irrespective of individual differences) was projected by the Progressive Plastic Industries in the middle of 1980's and debited the investors' accounts in April, 1990, with Tk 400/- for four right shares against five original shares when the corporation found that the company's shares are being quoted at the Stock Exchange much below par value. The corporation charged Tk 212/-, and not Tk 200/- as mentioned by Mr Rahman, showing same rates for purchase as well as interest on purchase of right shares. This is most unfair, unjust, and may be even illegal on the part of the corporation.

I understand that a public representative now heads the corporation as its chairman. We would normally expect him to look into the interest of thousands of investors instead of upholding any wrong and whimsical activity of the corporation he heads. So far the corporation has not issued any rejoinder against the charges brought in by the public from time to time.

B Hassan
52, Siddeshwari Circular Road, Shantinagar, Dhaka-1217

Human Rights

Sir, Human rights situation in Bangladesh has deteriorated, according to an assessment by US State Department.

Based on the report, US House Committee on Foreign Affairs has recommended that Bangladesh "redouble its efforts to guarantee that all Bangladeshis enjoy lives free from threats to their fundamental rights," since "democracy cannot survive in an atmosphere where the government is less than fully committed to the protection of individual human rights."

American concern about the well-being of Bangladeshis is

meetings at Shapla Chhattar, Dainik Bangla Square, Baitul Mukarram North Gate, Press Club Road, Zero Point, B B Avenue, Gulistan Cinema Square, Telegraph Office Square, Fulbaria Square etc, etc., and close the movement of traffic for hours together and the sufferings of the people know no bound.

Public sector corporations park their staff buses at busy and crowded roads in Motijheel Commercial Area obstructing the movement of the traffic.

Motor workshop owners carry out all sorts of repair works, welding, vulcanising, overhauling of the engine, body manufacturing and painting of the buses on Dhaka-Narayanganj Road at Toyibee Circular Kaptan Bazar Point, Jati Kali Mandir and Folder Street stranding the defective and dilapidated buses for weeks and months together.

Private bus owners, drivers and bus contractors park their buses at bus stops in rows of three to four buses and also make 'U' turn at many important crowded places disrupting the road traffic.

Hundreds of rickshaws also block the roads and make haphazard parking. Considering all the above factors the role of vendors and hawkers in creating traffic hazards in public roads and footpaths is of much lesser magnitude than those created by others.

M Rahaman
Zila School Road, Mymensingh

Eviction of hawkers

Sir, The small and petty fish fries, the hawkers and vendors, are being caught and packed off. But unfortunately, nobody dares to touch the big fishes, the public leaders, public sector corporations, private bus owners, drivers and bus contractors, motor workshop owners who have been creating terrible traffic problems in and around Gulistan and Motijheel Commercial area for a long time.

The public leaders block the public roads, hold public

We strongly feel that all are equal in the eyes of law and therefore the traffic rules and regulations should be equally applicable to all or the hawkers and the vendors should be set free like others.

O H Kabir
Wari, Dhaka-1203

Reduction in duty

Sir, The textile ministry has proposed 16 points to revamp the textile sector wherein the most significant point is to abolish duty on yarn imports.

PAKISTAN ELECTION PREVIEW

Promise of 'Free and Fair' Polls is there but Voters' Turnout is Likely to be the Lowest

M J Zahedi writes from Karachi

People's apathy could be traced to their disillusionment with the two top political leaders of the country. The caretakers' revelation that the country's economy was on the verge of disaster when they assumed power, took away much of the gloss from Nawaz Sharif's rule. Ms Bhutto, on the other hand, lost considerable lustre through her collusion with the former President, Ghulam Ishaq Khan.

6,800 people who have borrowed Rs 82 billion from the country's banks and have not bothered to pay back the money, has been made public. An ordinance forbids such people from becoming candidates unless the outstanding has been cleared. Though not many important political leaders' names appear on the list, it has created a sensation and has put a brake on unbridled enthusiasm. A former prime minister, Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi has been disqualified on this account but he has contested the Returning Officer's decision.

Other actions which have no direct bearing on the elections too have had some indirect effect. For example, the telephone, water and income tax departments have also published their own lists of defaulters. Many of these contain names of many leaders or their spouses or the business concerns they are connected with. Although these lists have not restrained them from contesting in the elections but have created a feeling among the common men that the rich were given a free hand to loot and plunder. And if that were true, concern for the poor could not be genuine and deep-rooted. The effect of publicising the

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People's Party (PPP) and the Nawaz Sharif faction of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML [N]). The former has fielded 167 candidates and the latter 168.

The Pakistan Islamic Front (PIF), led by Jamaat Islami Amir Qazi Hussain Ahmed with about 100 candidates, too, hopes to stage an impressive show.

Unlike previous years, the Jamaat is not contesting on its own; instead only a few months ago the Qazi launched the new party. More than 60 parties have put up candidates in the elections which are going to cost the national exchequer some Rs 420 million.

The appeal of the Jamaat

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