

## 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 fail 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 sea-saw 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 sport-loving 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 trappings 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 plea 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 Tiananmen 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 decades time boost the cause of competitive sport, specially athletics, in the down-under. But, by the example of Tokyo, Seoul and Beijing we know what kind 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 Samaranch 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.

POLLING 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 poster 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 blemished 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

## 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 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

poor being given money from the Baitul Maal (by the former prime minister) has been partly neutralised by the obvious intent to gain political mileage out of it.

People's apathy could also 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, to oust Nawaz Sharif and by accepting turncoats like Maulana Kausar Niazi and Ghulam Mustafa Khar in her fold. It showed her as bereft of political morality.

At the second level, the appeal of the MQM, basically a Mohajir party of Karachi and Hyderabad, was eroded by the revelation of its terrorist activities. Originally a creation of the establishment as a force against the PPP, the MQM began to be viewed as a problem when the Mohajirs turned towards it almost to a man. Attempts were made last year to dismantle it. These did not fully succeed ex-

cept in forcing its charismatic leader Altaf Hussain into self-exile to escape arrest and trial on various charges of terrorist activities. But the government failed to allow the party, now divided into two groups, to take part in the elections. Though divided, the MQM still remains a force to reckon with and may yet play the king maker's role both in the NA and Sindh PA. A rally held by the Altaf group which the absent leader addressed on telephone from London for more than an hour and the total strike organised by the other group were phenomenally successful.

The appeal of the Jamaat Islami has suffered by its turning against its own friends and allies. The image of each political party has thus suffered, to some degree, in the eyes of the voters.

However, the battle lines are now drawn. About 1,500 candidates are contesting 207 National Assembly seats for which polling will be held on October 6. About 5,000 are in the field for 483 provincial assembly seats in the four provinces for which polling will take place on October 9.

The major contest is, of course, between the Pakistan

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.

Like the parties the candidates, too, are the same as in previous elections. It seems, as always, win-ability of the candidates has been a major factor in awarding tickets. The so-called 'strong candidates', i.e. those who can clinch a victory by hook or by crook, have been given preference over the really deserving ones. Therefore nearly 80 per cent of those who are contesting are those who sat in the previous assembly or the ones before that. Only the PIF's selection has been different from the other two parties. Instead of nominating the traditional Malikis, Chaudhris and

Tiwarias, it has fielded many candidates from the middle and lower middle classes and professional groups like lawyers, teachers, doctors and small businessmen.

This year there has been no electoral alliances, only understandings euphemistically called electoral adjustments. The PPP showed the way in this respect. Taking advantage of the break-up of the Islami Juma'hoori Ittehad (IJI) which had clubbed all the anti-PPP forces in the last election and the split in the Pakistan Muslim League (now divided into eight groups), PPP has entered into understanding with PML (Junejo group) and Jamiat Ulama Islam (Fazlur Rahman group). That is why the number of its candidates in Punjab and NWFP where these two parties hold better chances, are less than what they were in the last elections.

A significant part of the PML(N)'s strategy is to establish that it is not exclusively a Punjab-based party. Nawaz Sharif has therefore been trying to make inroads in Sindh, stronghold of the PPP. His decision to launch his election campaign from Larkana, home of the Bhuttos, was a part of the same effort. Encouraged by his act of distributing land to the Haris while he was prime minister and by the support of the Pir of Pagara and small Sindh nationalist groups, PML(N) has fielded 34 candidates in Sindh — 19 more than what the IJI had put up in the last elections.

Although Nawaz Sharif is focusing on Sindh, he knows that he has to win in Punjab for, as his own experience has shown, he who rules Punjab rules Pakistan. His party has fielded 108 candidates for the 115 seats from Punjab.

(To be concluded tomorrow)

## Indonesia More Relaxed about Dissent

*Prosperity prompts Jakarta to loosen up Yuli Ismartono of Inter Press Service reports from Jakarta*

ernment's commitment to political openness.

Pramoedya's novels *The Earth of Mankind* and *Child of All Nations* have been translated into 20 languages. He has been nominated several times for the Nobel prize for literature and won the Freedom to Write Award from PEN American Centre in 1988.

But the author's internationally acclaimed writings are banned in Indonesia because of his former membership in the outlawed Communist Party of Indonesia.

Pramoedya was interned on the isolated eastern Indonesian island of Buru after the failed communist coup in 1965. He continued writing after his release in 1979, but even his new works are banned.

In a rare show of solidarity for Pramoedya, prominent figures from Indonesia's literary and arts community recently urged Education and Culture Minister Wardiman Djonegoro to lift the ban on Pramoedya's writings.

"We should no longer be

afraid of communism as I think it does not have a place in society anymore," said author and columnist Ajip Rosidi. Many of Pramoedya's works have long been used as material for literature classes in anti-communist Malaysia.

But Wardiman was non-committal, saying there was no such thing as unlimited freedom. "Freedom should be granted in phases according to society's capability and responsibility to use that freedom," he said.

There seems to be more encouraging development in the political field. Suharto, a former general who has ruled Indonesia which an iron hand for the past 28 years, has shown willingness to meet with dissidents.

His meetings with retired Gen A H Nasution, a revered hero of the war of indepen-

dence, sparked speculation of a reconciliation between the government and opposition groups.

Nasution, a leading member of the Petisi 50, a major opposition group comprising former military officers and government officials, has been prevented from leaving Indonesia for the past 10 years. Recent reports say he will soon be allowed to go to the United States for medical treatment.

In August, the government released six political detainees, including Muslim leader A M Fatwa who was imprisoned in 1984 for his fiery anti-government preachings.

At university campuses, a hotbed of political dissent in the 1960s and 1970s, students have again been holding debates on controversial issues. A few years ago, the government

arrested a number of student leaders for organising protest demonstrations.

Even the once taboo subject of child labour is now being addressed. Jakarta is seriously considering laws forbidding children under 16 to work and has promised strict enforcement.

Analysis says the most encouraging sign of political change is seen in the press, which has tentatively begun publishing editorials on the need for greater democracy.

The situation now calls for normalcy, for greater openness, for a better form of democracy in which everybody feels free to say what they

think and feel," said a recent editorial in the daily Indonesian Observer.

The Jakarta Post, supporting the move to lift the ban on Pramoedya's works, said that with the fall of communism, it was time to re-evaluate the security-oriented policy on the freedom of creativity.

But some opposition figures remain suspicious of the government's motives. Instead, the likes of Abdurrahman Wahid of the Forum for Democracy express hope that the new mood will encourage pro-democracy groups to intensify their struggle for true democracy.

Commenting on the government's gestures toward loosening up, he said, "It depends on the implementation. Let us see."

## OPINION

### BTV News

I am not really aware of the reactions it gives rise to the viewers, when they watch the prime BTV news at 8 and 10 pm.

BTV, has now come a long way after its inception. There had hardly been any progress in news collection and transmission in real terms, after all these years. I used to think BTV newsroom people make an extensive effort in gathering and presenting the news. But to my utter surprise, I discovered that all the international pieces come copied straight from either CNN or BBC. It is a vain repetition. In any case, the viewers can have more updated and detailed news much earlier than BTV prime news.

BTV also sometimes reward us with unnecessary and irrelevant international news. To cite an example, a few weeks ago, President of the USA had announced some schemes for the veterans and POWs of the Vietnam war, which was accepted with a mixed reaction and widely viewed on the CNN. That same piece of news was transmitted the same night on BTV, only this time in Bengali version. I couldn't find any relevance of this item to us which perhaps was an American propaganda.

BTV ought to have much more of the regional news which is greatly lacking. More about the South Asian and other neighbouring countries should appear on the screen. Well, it is conspicuously understood that the BTV have constraints in resources. Shouldn't then they concentrate much more on the national news as our demands for the international events are being met abundantly by CNN and BBC?

But there is a different story about the local pieces that are produced for the prime news. It is rather sad to find out that still, most of the national news are centred on the activities of the ruling party in a democratic environment. Hardly, we are able to view other party's affairs. There are not also much of the business and district news round-up which is a vital part of any news.

The BTV news sometimes are biased and not produced from informative and analytical point of view. A few years back during the autocratic regime, one of the principal Ministers in the Cabinet was highly acclaiming the President in literary terms just because he saw tears in President's eyes

who was moved to see the sufferings of the people at Adamji Jute Mills. Another time, the President was watching a small girl's acting in a public place and burst into tears emotionally. The Minister beside him was really enjoying the show and smiling but the moment he discovered that his boss was in a different mood he intentionally turned his face gloomy and began to weep. All these did indeed hit the headlines in the news to show the compassionate souls of the leaders. It seems the same trend is still continuing, though in a different way.

The thing which BTV likes to do is copying ideas with which they fail to cope later. CNN displays the scene of their newsroom full of active workers and office automation equipment, when newscasters are on the air. BTV copied this arrangements but their newsroom turned out to be an area with a few ghosts moving in the dark very cautiously behind the newscasters. BTV had abandoned this presentation for reasons unknown to us. Now what we see in the background is the pointed head of the national martyrs memorial pinching Bangladesh in a shabby coloured world map.

The BBC or CNN don't bother in any way even to come down hard on their premiers and ministers. The BTV news ought to follow the same route, but surely it has to be constructive and factual representations. The present democratic government promised to free the BTV, before going to power. To date, we are yet to see any fruitful results.

The viewers are reluctant to rely on the national news of BTV as rarely they get independent views. 'Greatest wheels' is the impression one gets while watching BTV news. The public are in great need of impartial, informative and constructive news free from the regulatory grips of the government. There should be such ingredients that people from all walks of life could completely depend on the BTV news to assess and judge the national affairs.

Can we look forward to that day when all the viewers will be eagerly awaiting to hear 'This is BTV news from Dhaka which you want to know and which you need to know'?

Harold D Biswas  
Plassey Barrack, Dhaka

## To the Editor...

### ICB performance

Sir, This refers to a letter by Mr Adebaur Rahman, published in your daily on 13th Aug, on the performance of ICB. Apparently ICB itself had purchased the right shares of 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

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 freedoms irrespective of individual differences) was projected by the recent earthshaking incident resulting from a legal abuse that eventually upheld the great American social justice — save the allegations about capital punishment to the minor and mentally ill as well as conviction on wrong or faulty charge without adequate legal representation.

The recordmaking American roles as a trouble-shooter and as a generous donor like a friend-in-need have fortunately kept on installing confidence in the impoverished regions which virtually contributed to the unipolar New World Order.

Bangladesh at the Geneva Conference on Human Rights has expressed her opinion in favour of Universal Declaration of Human Rights without "dual standards" even when her own human rights standard is short of mark.

By any chance, should American monitors focus on the facts of the matters, "democratic" Bangladesh must be in a situation as grave as that overpowered both "dictatorial" and "autocratic" regimes since her independence.

M Rahman  
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 Moti-jheel Commercial area for a long time.

The public leaders block the public roads, hold public

meetings at Shapla Chattar, 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 Moti-jheel 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 Toyneeb Circular Kaptan Bazar Point, Jai 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 hazardous 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.

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  
Wart, 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.

Considering the recent announcement abolishing duty for capital machineries imported by the 100% export oriented industries and the present proposals by the textile ministry, I wonder if the government will consider abolishing duty for capital machineries altogether i.e. blanket abolishment irrespective of whether it is export oriented or not. After all by abolishing duty for those serving the export markets only, what about those serving the local markets? In other words, what about those industries serving the 12 crore Bangladeshis? Why should they be deprived of this facility?

The Finance Minister has not specifically mentioned where and on what matters he is finding opposition to his reforms, apart from VAT. One can safely guess the opposition insofar as returning or de-nationalisation of the industries must be a matter of life and death issue. As those administrators of the nationalised industries having become de facto owners overnight will quite naturally oppose tooth and nail. Also reduction in power rates which even a few years earlier was Tk 0.40 per unit, today it is about Tk 5/-.

Similarly WASA and gas have also increased hundred folds not to mention wages sector, where the frequent relenting to the pressure of the SKOP demands has practically done away with the credibility of the government. It is therefore hoped that the government will extend a patient thought to the proposals for removing the impediments in issuance of IRC/Pass Books to the industrialist and also to consider the blanket abolition of duty irrespective of export oriented industry or otherwise.

Only this I feel can give a fillip to the gravely stagnant micro economic sector-private sector industrialisation. After all is not good governance all about serving the best interest of the people?

Salahuddin Jamal  
Banashghata, Chittagong