

Environmental Concern

Extreme heat in the summer and an abnormal fall of temperature in the winter characterise the environment in the north of the country. Reports have it that the environmental scientists find in this the first symptom of a large-scale desertification. Other symptoms are no less unmistakable. Over the past years the average rainfall in that region has been recording a sharp decrease. Already drought has become an endemic problem, seriously threatening the lives and living of about four crore people of the northern and south-western regions of the country.

It is too early to estimate the environmental and economic costs as a consequence of this desertification process. But about one thing there is no doubt that the natural catastrophe may prove disastrous, exactly on the scale of Ethiopia or sub-Saharan region, for the entire country. Once more than self-sufficient in food, Ethiopia along with Somalia, has witnessed the worst famine of recent times. The way temperature is fluctuating and salinity of soil increasing, points to a most dreaded prospect for the regions concerned. Experts have already expressed fear that the regions dependent on the flow of the river Padma may soon experience a change — obviously for the worse — in their sub-humid eco-system.

Accusing fingers have time and again been pointed to Farakka Barrage, the unilateral withdrawal of water by India at which point has much to do with the danger facing Bangladesh. Before its construction, even in the lean season the average water flow of the Padma at the Hardinge Bridge was recorded at 70,000 cusecs which came down to as low as 9,218 cusecs in March 1993. Unofficial sources put this figure even below 8,000 cusecs. The difference between the previous and present flows speaks for itself. The immediate impacts as experienced by different regions of Bangladesh and West Bengal are proving highly disastrous in terms of both environment and economy. An ESCAP report has categorically cited a special desertification process that has been slowly taking over 38 per cent of the country's area in the south-west. On the other hand, the Ganga-Kapotakkha Project meant to irrigate 400,000 acres of land has been virtually rendered useless due to lack of water. Then the abnormal increase in salinity of river waters has already caused extensive damage to the Sunderbans; further rise in salinity will simply endanger the very existence of the world's largest mangroves.

The construction of roads and highways mostly east-west across the country and the building up of other development undertakings, including embankments, since Pakistan days, have stood in the way of water disposal into the sea through rivers causing their siltation and in turn floods of unprecedented order. Add to this the large-scale and mindless felling of trees and destruction of forests and the process of environmental damage can be gauged. In the Sunderbans, the mayhem is still continuing without any respite.

When other predictions and studies — particularly concerning the ozone layer — are even gloomier for the whole world, our own undoings make a very bad reading. The British research camp in Antarctica has observed the other day a serious atmospheric disorder — a signal to the much-dreaded deluge earlier than predicted.

The threats therefore come both from the sea and the land. For us they mean almost a doomsday, for the aridity in the north and south-west and the loss of land — according to predictions between 10 and 25 per cent of the country — might conspire together to reduce us to an unenviable entity. Not only should we mend our ways to restore the environmental health, but also place our case before the international community for a possible way out of the danger.

Why This Delay?

Hashem Khan is at last off to getting treatment abroad. If not to New York or London, at least to Singapore. We only pray and hope that it hasn't been already too late for him to come out of the woods.

Who is to blame for the delay in sending him abroad for treatment? His condition has been desperate for quite some time. From his intensive-care unit bed in the BIRDEM he had sent out a dying man's frantic appeal to the Prime Minister. It is obvious that the SOS did not reach the PM. Presidents and Prime Ministers are wont to helping unknown orphans and disadvantaged young people without any known basis for choosing the beneficiaries except that the act always gets an awful lot of publicity. But the government did not feel like reaching favourably to Hashem Khan's case — and chose to be deliberate about it, why?

It is possible that about a half of the members of the cabinet may not know about Khan's achievements as a painter or his unique contributions to the juvenile literature and organisations of our country. It is not necessary for our cabinet to be overly endowed with intellectual and cultural awareness. But then a government is a government. Can it be said of either Majid-ul-Huq or Badruddoza Chowdhury or Mirza Golam Hafiz or Professor Jahanara Begum or of any simple top bureaucrat in the culture or health ministry or in the Prime Minister's Secretariat that Hashem Khan is not known to them as a national asset?

Then how was this delay possible? Why didn't very many people at the top of the present dispensation show any concern for his life. Ceaseless appeals to the government, appearing every other day in the national dailies, are positively demeaning for people of Mr Hashem Khan's stature and service to nation. A way must be found for the government to be less impervious in such delicate matters and more responsive.

There is no occasion right now for eulogising Hashem. This has been an experience leaving a bad taste in the mouth. Let this be the case last of its kind. Our democratic government should be ready to support all of our national personalities when they need it so badly.

THE seventeenth century French dramatist Jan Moliere tells us the story of a shopkeeper turned gentleman who sought to drop a letter at the feet of a lady of quality. The shopkeeper went to see a pompous teacher, and asked him to draft a letter for him, which was not to be composed either in prose or in poetry. The teacher said that this cannot be, because all communications have to be either in prose or in poetry. The bewildered shopkeeper then asked the teacher, in what language he was talking. The shopkeeper, when told that he was speaking in prose all the time, was still more surprised. The same is perhaps true with at least some of us. We are communicating all the time and are speaking in the form of prose. But then the prose that we use may be dull, or it may sparkle and dance with life. Communication has different objectives at different times. It may be intended to pass an idea or an information to every member of an organisation or it may be intended to win the hand of the fair lady. In whichever way we look at our communication it has to be effectively composed and delivered to achieve the intended objective.

Herein we are concerned with human communication that has flowed from the beginning of life, and not the 'hardware' of communication, and then again we shall specifically concern ourselves with communication as applied to the management of an organisation.

In every form of communication, there shall be the communicator the message and the communicatee, and the intended objective is only achieved when the communicatee acts according to the intended objective of the communicator. Both the persons concerned will be required to speak on the same wave length for the particular occasion.

Communications can be verbal or written. In actual practice we depend more on the written communication, as this alone

Effective Communication Can Lead to Efficiency and Achievement

by Shahabuddin Mahtab

forms a permanent record. Communications can also be downward, lateral or upward.

Types of Communication

Downward communication is the most widely used medium in our system of administration and management. Because of the patriarchal and hierarchical system of our society, the flow of ideas originate from the top, and then is passed through the different layers to the bottom. Taking this into account we have to give our special thoughts to this type of communication. The level of understanding at the top level of management and the lower levels vary widely because of differing levels of education and other factors. The Managing Director/General Manager and the other senior officers in an organisation will be required to form their communication in such a way, that its true meaning is easily and fully understood by the person concerned. Sometimes it may be necessary to redraft, abridge or clarify the instructions at different levels of management. Whenever it is intended that the instructions should be passed in its original form to the lowest level of management, the language and the idea should be such that it is easily understood at all levels. Unless this is done, the very purpose of communication will be frustrated.

The lateral type of communication is used, in between persons who are holding similar positions in the same or different organisations or in different departments. This is an easier form of understanding process, where both the communicator and the communicatee generally have similar backgrounds of education, culture etc. For efficient management greater recourse to this form of communication is necessary. This mode of exchange of ideas is much less taken recourse to, than is necessary for our purpose. Many of us are too self-conscious or shy to discuss problems and issues with our colleagues freely. A radical change in our attitude is called for in this sphere for reaching the limits of better understanding.

Upward communication is the most neglected art and tool of management in our country, and acts as a bottleneck in the performance of our tasks. An element of fear and aloofness pervades through most of our organisations, resulting in a total lack of communication from bottom upwards. The present climate can be changed with humane warmth, sincerity and sense of participation by all concerned and also dignifying of the person irrespective of the work he does. The senior management people in business and in the Government are placed in a very favourable position to make it possible for all creative ideas to flow freely, and for total removal of the prevalent restrictive practices.

The first step to the flow of ideas upwards is that one should be easily approachable. The creation of a helpful and sympathetic attitude in an organisation, leads to easier accessibility of the operative to the supervisor, of the junior management staff to the senior management staff and in this way to the door of the number one man in the organisation/department/government. As a living river needs to have a continuous flow of water, so also a living organisation has to be fed with ideas, both upwards and downwards. The shop floor workers and the first line su-

perisors are the persons who are directly concerned with the day to day work and its problems. And these problems are needed to reach the top management. Ideas relating to improved working methods, new lines of production, economy in the cost of production and harmonious industrial relation do necessarily emanate from the flow of upward communication. The operative staff and the first line supervisors are the storehouse of ideas, through which an organisation will continuously grow. The presence of an easy line of communication at all levels of an organisation leads to greater understanding, the easing of tensions and lesser disputes.

Barriers
There are various barriers to communication such as, of language, of status, of distance and of pressure of work. People of different educational levels and backgrounds have different stock of words, with the result that there is often a failure of communication. In this case the person with a richer vocabulary should be able to bring him down to the level of the person with a much smaller vocabulary. Some of us have a tendency to make our language a difficult one, and then go on embellishing it. Whereas this may be an excellent effort for a writer who is engaged in literary work, this is certainly a fruitless exercise in most other cases. The sender of a message has to keep in view the communicatee, and only his requirements in mind. Unless the receiver of a message fully understands it, the communication has been partial or it has not taken place at all.

Many of the communications which are necessary do not take place at all, because many of us

are so 'status conscious' to make it. The position is quite so different in the developed countries, and the sooner we emulate it, the better it should be for our management and administrative efficiency.

The physical distance is also a barrier to communication though that has been greatly overcome by the 'communication hardware' such as telephone, telex, wireless, T.V. etc. The best form of communication is, of course the face to face conversation between persons. Because of today's rapid transportation facilities many direct contacts are being made. The frequent use of fax, the telephone and the telex has also quickened the communication process.

The individual's pressure of work is also a barrier to good communication. Pressure of time prevents us in making the appropriate communication or making it at the right time. For this, we have to plan our schedule like everything else. Without good communication, we can hardly look forward to good management.

Art of Listening

Another aspect of communication that we have to look into is the neglected art of listening. We are far more interested in talking than listening to others. We often close our minds in receiving the message of the other person, or do not give it the mental attention it deserves. Developing the art of careful listening, without interrupting the speaker can be a richly rewarding experience. True comprehension is hardly possible when the mind of the listener is changing the clouds.

For effective transmission of ideas, it is also necessary for the speaker or the writer to ex-

plain at length (or very briefly at times) the 'why, where, what, who and which' of a thing or of an action which is contemplated. In this connection, we may refer to the often-told story of digging a hole. A man was told by his superior to dig a hole. As soon as the first hole was dug he was asked to dig a second hole. After the third hole, the workman declared, 'I quit, this is silly'. The superior then finally explained that he was trying to locate an old pipeline. 'Why did you not tell me?' demanded the employee. 'I was stationed here during the war, when this was a fort, and I helped lay the pipeline'. He promptly took the boss to the exact spot in question.

The story may seem strange, but such things are happening, at least to some of us. The process of elaboration may take different forms, for different people but for effective direction, implementation and completion of a task, the explaining of a 'thing' in very necessary.

There may be a communication failure or a communication gap if a follow up or a feedback system is lacking. In our existing condition, a subordinate official will hardly venture to seek the clarification of an instruction or an order even though he does not understand it. It would save much of our time, and energy if we frequently check up, if a message has been correctly accepted.

Communication is the very life line of management, and a qualitative change in it, in any organisation, would lead to greater understanding and the sense of participation by all its members and a general commitment to its objective. On the other hand poor, bad, ineffective and limited communication in office or in the shop floor leads to tension and uncoordinated work. In our country, it is all the more necessary that we make a conscious effort to improve the process of communication at all stages. This in turn will lead us not only to greater efficiency in management, but also to a rich and rewarding life.

THE long political career of Greek Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis could be drawing to a close as he fights an uphill battle for re-election.

After three years of exercising economic austerity and monetarism that has squeezed salary-earners and pensioners, Mitsotakis faces a serious challenge from his old foe, socialist leader Andreas Papandreou. He is also looking over his shoulder at a much younger rival in the conservative camp who may hold the balance of power when the polling is over.

Antonis Samaras, Mitsotakis' onetime foreign minister, is stumping the country determined to force Mitsotakis and Papandreou, men both in their seventies, to retire to the sidelines along with their old-fashioned methods of political patronage. Barely 40 years old, Samaras already has wide appeal in the countryside and among younger voters.

Though Samaras cannot expect to get a large percentage of the vote, he feels he can play an increasingly bigger role in Greek affairs from now on. Of the coming elections, he says, 'The country is turning over a new leaf.'

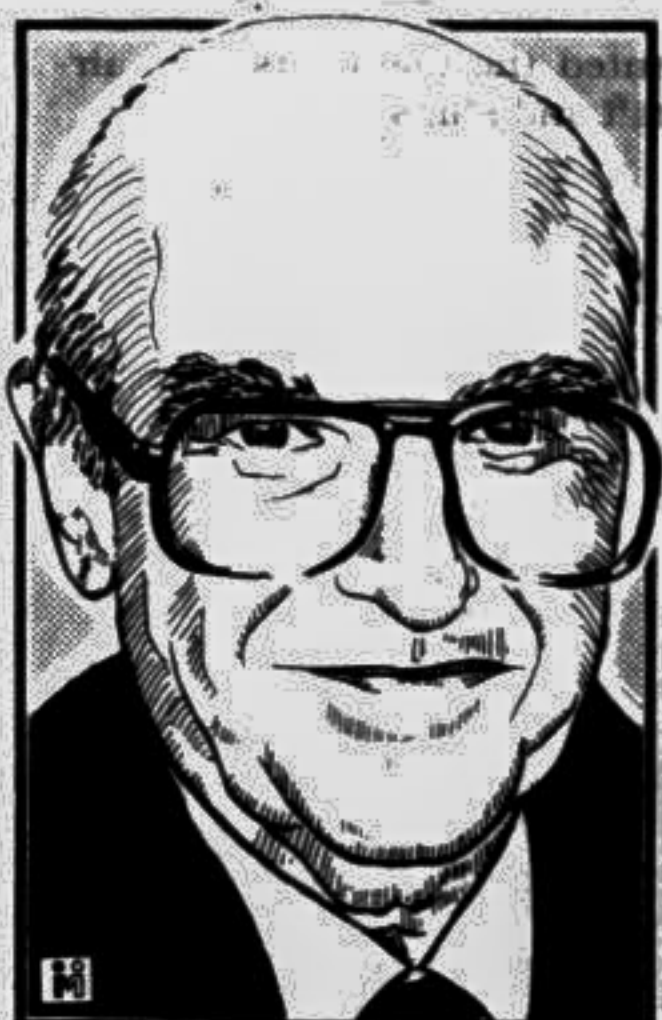
Mitsotakis was forced to ask Greek President Constantine Karamanlis for early elections on September 9 after Samaras lured several key parliamentary deputies away from the conservative ruling party, New Democracy, and into his own Political Spring party. In that one day, Mitsotakis's majority of two in the 300-seat Parliament was shaved to nothing.

Though Samaras says he

Greeks Gear up for Ballot Battle

John Carr writes from Athens

Greek Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis is fighting an uphill battle for re-election. After three years of unpopular economic reforms he faces a serious challenge from his old foe, socialist leader Andreas Papandreou. But his former foreign minister, 40-year-old Antonis Samaras, is determined to force Mitsotakis and Papandreou, men both in their seventies, into the background. Samaras already has wide appeal among younger voters. The election is on October 10.



Former Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou 'Dinosour'

opposes the Mitsotakis government on key foreign and domestic issues, his real motive is believed to be personal revenge. In April 1992 Mitsotakis unceremoniously sacked him as foreign minister for bellicosity against the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia.

Most Greeks, seconded eagerly by Samaras, believe the

ex-Yugoslav republic has no right to use the Greek name of Macedonia.

They also fear that expansionists in Macedonia have designs on the prosperous Greek province of the same name. The Macedonia issue is expected to be the biggest single vote-getter for Samaras' party.

Greek opinion polls so far show a large number of undecided voters who favour neither Mitsotakis nor the socialist Papandreou — dubbed 'dinosours' by the younger set. Both men are experts in the Greek political art of rousfeti — a form of pork-barrelling in which constituents are promised public sector jobs and other benefits in return for their votes on election day. Rousfeti is widely blamed for the notorious bloating of the Greek public services.

Mitsotakis is bitter towards his youthful former foreign minister for splitting the conservative camp just when a long economic austerity programme was starting to achieve results, encouraged by European Community (EC) officials. This year his government pledged

that inflation — the highest in the European Community — would be hammered down from 16 per cent to a single digit by the end of the year. That objective now seems unlikely.

Brussels was also encouraged by reforms in the Greek banking and finance system, and efforts to slash the huge public debt of about 25 trillion drachmas (\$100 billion), which is the highest in Greece's history. Mitsotakis had also started a bold but politically unpopular drive to privatise the unwieldy public utilities, a drive which is now in abeyance.

Meanwhile, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Pasok) of Andreas Papandreou is gearing up for a return to power. Recent polls show it at least 10 points ahead of New Democracy, though it remains uncertain whether Papandreou will be able to get a governing majority.

Diplomats and international business people in Athens worry that if Papandreou wins the October 10 elections, Greece could become odd man out in the EC, as in the years 1981 to 1989, when Papandreou was the country's controversial

prime minister.

Samaras remains the wild card in the elections. Though he has not said so openly, the boyish, Harvard-educated politician hopes to siphon off enough support from the two bigger and older parties to make him the king-maker when it becomes time to work out a coalition after October 10.

One popular scenario is that other talented discontents in New Democracy who have openly expressed their dislike of Mitsotakis as a leader may join with Samaras in deposing him. This would block the socialists from returning to power. Already, younger conservatives in their forties and fifties are taking up positions for a future race for the conservative leadership.

Whatever the outcome on October 10, Greece can expect to see a growing challenge to the 'dinosours' from a generation that is impatient with the old patronage system and believes in faster political and economic reform.

— GEMINI NEWS

JOHN CARR has lived in Athens for many years, working as a freelance broadcaster and writer.

OPINION
Fish Tanks to Think Tanks

A Mawas

From fish tanks to think tanks is a long journey ahead, although the trip from pisciculture to brain culture may be only of a few feet — from the depth of the pond to six feet above the ground level.

The UN team of administrative experts wisely did not spell out any recommendations, but only prepared an analysis of the current system and practices (according to press reports). Amongst ourselves we cynically point out that three Bengalee owners find it difficult to run a single company — three are a crowd, and two are not company. As far as love for power is concerned, we are not lagging behind any country; in fact, we must be leading on this count, along with the leaders of many developing countries, where autocracy or one-man rule is more the norm than the exception.

The reasons are not far to seek. From feudalism to democracy is a life-long pilgrimage, lasting one or more generations. The presence of the middle class does not help in accelerating the journey. Its absence concentrates power; while its presence creates multi-parties. The divergence of opinions makes the scene lively but rather fruitless. It is like a circus: all the entertainment is confined within a tight circle. It is the amphitheater of the brave who go in for the uncalculated risks, reminding us of Androcles and the lion. In the pagan sense, it is the survival of the fittest — but not in the physical sense.

The economics of supply and demand operates under such conditions — those who have not tasted power have a craving for it, without first testing it. Once in power, this testing (not tasting) period starts. Naturally there are bound to be some false starts. So start all over again — and the nation gains useful experience of running the country in different years. The only problem, which is technical, is that these power vehicles do not come with the reverse gear. The solution, paradoxically, is a change of the driver. The driver drives — on traffic rules yet — and drives lustily; and drives the country mad. So we have a driving

school, in the making. This is the prototype of our version of the Think Tank (UN, please note).

After the testing period, the tasting period starts. This is done in a patronising manner, on the grand scale. It would be rude to compare the situation with an adult playing with newly fangled toys. It is serious business. As for the rest, we are witnesses for the last four decades, so there is no point elaborating on the details.

Coming to think tanks, basically it is a feedback or monitoring system. Feedbacks are generally of two types, positive and negative. In a feedback loop, a part of the output is fed back into the input of the system, for automatic correction or balancing. The correct feedback enhances the working of the system.

Political feedback can be arranged to provide a subjective assessment, depending on what the boss wishes to hear. It may be internal or external, selective or arbitrary, depending on the terms of reference. In a democratic environment, the feedback through the think tanks is transparent. In emerging administrations, the novelty of such tanks has not yet worn off. The society also needs some preparatory period to be able to render useful service at the national level. Encouragement, mental awareness, and disciplinary exercises are initially needed. It is not difficult, the raw infrastructure exists — it is a question of stepping on the gears.

Developing administrations tend to operate in insulation and isolation, concentrated at the core of the civil service or bureaucracy, and external overtures or advances are generally shunned. A change of atmosphere has to be initiated from the very top to being in some fresh air to the outmoded administrative traditions.

In modern terms, the administration has to be made interactive, the circle enlarged, and more informality encouraged at various levels. It is better to start and stumble, then rule in the splendour of aloofness.

To the Editor

Whither accountability?

Sir, In countries which claim even a semblance to civilized norms and ethics, the unspeakable tragedy at an unmanned railway crossing in the heart of the city of Dhaka, would be sufficient ground for the Communications Minister and the Minister or whoever is in charge of the Fire Brigade, to resign. But that only happens in governments which are accountable to the public. And at this point our elected representatives, occupying elevated positions in the government supported by a seemingly corrupt and surely inefficient civil structure, do not consider themselves accountable to anybody, least of all the tax payer, who by the way pays the inefficient minister's salary and an equally inefficient civil servant's salary.

An important railway crossing in unattended for years, resulting in a tragedy which befuddles the mind; a fire engine manned by 'trained personnel' commits a crime which would make a six-year old double up with laughter. And in case they do not know what I am talking about, or fail to understand the sense of humour of a six-year-old, the fire engine is supposed to put out fires, not light them.

Who or what is responsible, for this double tragedy? Would the government please, at last, come out of its self made cocoon and answer a few questions? The next time round, it might not be such a bad idea, if the

fire engine is set on fire, with the individuals responsible for such blunders, inside.

P. Haque
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Sir, The incidents of accident, killing and arson overwhelms one every morning as one opens the newspaper. Some may say we are becoming immune to that. But those people are very vain. Because only those who become disabled or lose their dear and near ones can understand how dreadful this allies.

The recent news of a family being roasted alive after their car was hit by a train because of the inefficiency of the fire fighters is most disturbing. It is unfortunate that those employed in such essential services as fire fighting, police, ambulance driving, nursing, etc. etc. are not only ill trained but they are not motivated to think that they are 'not just doing a job' but are serving the people and the nation in a very special way. On the other hand the people must be informed of how 'special' those involved in these services are.

The instant reaction of the public after the misdeed of the fire service personnel was to set fire on the ultra modern expensive fire truck. Now, this reaction is condemnable but there is an obvious reason for it.

Because the public knows that the authority will not punish those responsible for negligence of duty. Therefore in a symbolic way they burnt the fire truck. Unfortunately the loss was of the nation and the people who set it on fire. The time has come to put a stop to this sort of irrational behavior. To do this our social and political leaders must come forth and behave more rationally as they make demands for justice, equality and liberty and the means by which they can attain them. Democracy and responsibility go hand in hand. You cannot have one without the other.

Akku Chowdhury
West Nakhalpara, Dhaka

Poor children and women

Sir, Attention of the public has recently been drawn to the following provisions of the Factory Act, 1965 by a notification: a) No child who has not completed 14 years of age be required or allowed to work in any factory; b) No woman shall be allowed to work in a factory after 8.00 pm.

There may be a point of controversy on provision 'a'. To some, child labour at an age when a child should be reading and playing, may appear most cruel. But in an economy, that as obtains in Bangladesh, where the child's daily food in-

take depends on his/her own income with no guardian to fall back on, stopping them to seek their livelihood may be criminal. This is a serious issue and let us come to a consensus with reference to our socio-economic conditions and not mere on sentimental or emotional reasons which only the West can afford to enjoy.

The provision 'b' is also unacceptable. Why should a woman be barred by law from employment after 8 pm? Yes, she cannot be compelled to work after 8 pm just as you cannot compel some one to work overtime more than 4 hours. But within her working hours, if she chooses to work at a time convenient to her which may be after 8 pm there is no reason to deny her this basic right. If a male can earn after 8 pm why not she? Or does her working after 8 pm become an unsocial activity? It is high time that suitable amendments to such provisions of Factory Act is brought about to challenge the competitive world of the 21st Century.

Mere rhetorics and platitudes of the policy makers in seminars and discussions in the comfort of air conditioned venue, will only kick the poor child and female in the stomach instead of saving them from hunger and poverty.

M A Shaikh
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