Serving constituent interests

can also be taken to absurd

lengths. Under autocratic

regimes, men in power have

invested disproportionately

large public resources in their

constituencies depriving the

The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Tuesday, November 30, 1993

Lessons from the Crisis

We congratulate the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition for their spirit of compromise and their willingness to step back from their entrenched positions. It was the flexibility on the part of the two leaders that opened up ways for negotiations and paved the way for the compromise that ultimately saved the day.

At the end of such a crisis, it is only natural that we should look for winners and losers, and we clearly have both. The winner, in this case, is the democratic process and more importantly, the Parliament itself. The two leading parties, and especially their leaders, accepted the fact that, whatever may have been the relative merit of their original positions, it was far better for democracy and for the country, to compromise than to continue their confrontation. Also the winner was stability and the process of institutionalisation of democracy. But far above everything else, the most significant winner was the country as a whole. For we believe, that as people we now stand reassured that our leaders — when it really comes to the crunch - will opt for the greater national interest. rather than take a partisan or personal stand.

The first lesson to learn from this crisis is to understand how delicate and fragile our democratic edifice is, that the slightest mis-step by our leaders put tremendous pressure upon our democratic institutions, leading to a point of near collapse: The second lesson is that our leaders, especially Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina, must be made fully aware how important they are to the nation, and as such, how much 'good' or 'bad' their every word or ges ture can do to us. An unparliamentary speech followed by an unparliamentary response can lead as we have seen — to political crisis of far reaching consequences. Since the major contenders in the conflict have decided to bury the hatchet, we, therefore, urge all to let bygones be bygones and give singular attention to governance and nation building.

We are greatly heartened by the Prime Minister's promise to make the Parliament truly the political heart of the government. However, we will have more concrete reasons to celebrate when we see the Leader of the House playing her role inside the Parliament. An argument can be made that Begum Zia, by not sitting in the sessions, have contributed to the erosion of the prestige of the Parliament and of the parliamentary system. A point also needs to be made about the cooperation between the Treasury and the Opposition benches. The constant badgering of the opposition as the "rejected force," and "anti-people", "anti-development" elements, responsible for everything that is negative, and nothing ever positive, will not lead to the type of cooperation that the PM is talking about. On the other hand the Opposition's depiction of the government as 'neo-autocrats' and one that has lost all moral right to govern will also be counterproductive to the type of collaboration that the Opposition is looking for.

The bottomline is that a radical change of heart is called for. The compromise solution that we are welcoming today, will have some element of durability and permanence, only if it is accompanied by a new appreciation of each other by the Treasury and the Opposition benches. If our repeated suggestions did not make the desired impact, then the experiences of the past few years should, that both the government and the opposition need one another to tackle the gigantic development problems that lie ahead. Going at it alone, and denigrating the otherside along the way, lie at the core of the deep mistrust and bitterness, which burst into the open creating the just resolved crisis

We urge both the BNP and the AL to look deep down within themselves and find out how, each of them, have contributed to the crisis, and now, how they can bring our politics out of it. Only then we will have learnt something from this crisis.

The Big, Bad Provider

The Parliament was on Sunday told that 0.86 per cent of the population of Bangladesh were employed by the government in its establishments including autonomous bodies. The figure needn't be incorrect or even suspect although it is very much misleading. Less than one per cent? It gives the impression of being almost negligible. Which, at 9.46 lakh, it is far from so. And this figure very evidently doesn't include such populous clusters on government payroll as the armed services, the paramilitary etc. It is not at all clear if this 0.86 per cent include the primary teachers who are government employees and come in a number far exceeding a hundred thousand, or the Ansars and the VDP both of whom should be as numerous as the primary teachers. There are then big sections of jobholders whose salaries are paid mostly by the government — such as the private school and college teachers. A more circumspect figure would certainly run up to much more than 1 per cent. And for clarity's sake we would even then prefer saying it not in percentages but in absolute figures, say 12 lakh government jobholders.

. What kind of a number is that — too small or too big or just abut reasonable? For an answer the totality of the output of this vast magnitude of people has to be determined — which should be a quite formidable job. It is then better to go by samplings. And then we come across the universally accepted fact that all government posts and positions and establishments — barring a few — are overstaffed. And we know the reason for that which, by itself, is

far from being an abominable thing. The government has over the years, and as a matter of course, become the biggest provider in the land. The government has long been generously providing people with jobs without ever very much trying to justify that with government's true needs or expanding the base of those needs. The machine has thus been becoming inefficient — inexorably and at a high speed. This act of philanthropy by the government has dangerous hazards. Wastage of manpower is not all. The indolent ways of the excess manpower infests the necessary strength in no time. Inefficiency generated by unnecessarily big staffing of the biggest single employment house then takes on the total employment situation and degenerates it.

The use of the government establishments as a dumping ground for the nation's unemployed by the politically and otherwise powerful must stop. But the way Ersahd tried to improve upon the absurd situation isn't either a good antidote. The government, as the supreme collective instrument of the people, must so design the society's productive activities and the services as to make non-governmental agencies and initiatives to generate employment more than the former can be expected to.

Responsibilities of Parliamentarians — Bangladesh Experience

by A M A Muhith

experience with parliamentary system is limited, although a kind of parliament was formed in 1862, more than a hundred vears ago. But those were the days of colonial rule and representative government in the subcontinent was still to emerge, we got representative government in 1947 but for Bangladesh it was only an apology for representative

government. We had parliamentary form of government for two years after liberation and now we are barely two and half years old as a parliamentary democracy. We have parliamentary system which means that the majority party in the parliament exercises executive authority. This is quite different from the US system of democracy where the executive is also directly elected and parliament remains responsible for legislation and partial supervision of the

executive. Parliamentary system has developed over centuries and initially the parliament exercised authority over tax and financial powers of the executive and was active in securing the rights of man. Legislation fixed the rights of man and the way the executive would discharge its governance responsibility. The power over the purse gave parliament significant authority over the executive and bestowed on it what came to be known as war

In Great Britain, in 1215 Magna Carta established the authority of parliament over the purse. But for protection of individual rights, Habeas Corpus Act was still needed in 1679. However, the real modern Bill of Rights was the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens adopted in France in 1789 and the Bill of Rights amendment of US constitution in 1791. Universal suffrage was ensured only by Representation of People's Act of 1918 in UK and the nineteenth amendment of the US Constitution in 1920.

Historically, thus, parliamentarians responsible for legislation; for protection of people's rights, for tax and budget powers of the state and for generally overseeing the exercise of

executive powers. They have very important functions on behalf of their constituents.

It should be noted that responsible and representative parliament is a very recent phenomenon in the history of our country. Government in the meantime has grown enormously and state responsibilities have expanded rapidly, specifically in the area of economic activities. Because parliamentary responsibility was not there in Bangladesh as the state expanded its activities, the traditions established have necessarily been autocratic and we now face very special problems in enforcing parliamentary authority and responsibility.

In our country, the executive has been supreme in all activities, including legislation. And the political leadership of the executive operated essentially through very wellorganised and well-structured central bureaucracy. The steel

parliamentarians. But this will require patience; the culture of parliamentary democracy or, for that matter, the democratic culture is new to us and it will take time to take roots.

Economic activities of government have vastly expanded in this country when parliament was powerless. But it is economic activities in which all parliamentarians and their constituents are seriously interested. Economic activities like other government activities are carried out under the shroud of secrecy. The Policy Framework Paper (PFP) which defines medium term economic policy and objectives of the country is never shared with parliament and perhaps not even with all ministries of the government. The budget discussion is hardly comprehensive and information sharing on both taxation proposals and expenditure programmes are minimal Budget approved at the

determining influence on both national objectives and party programmes. There is a balancing exercise which all public leaders have to do. They must understand that they have a dual role. They have to reflect people's wishes and at the same time they have to lead people in articulating their views on national or party interests. Most often this role is misunderstood and leadership role in forming or moderating people's wishes languishes by

the wayside. The constituents seek a great deal from their representatives in our country and it is qualitatively different from what they usually ask in mature parliamentary democracies They seek participation in economic activities, they seek relief form effects of fiscal policies, they seek protection of their basic human rights and above all they seek immunity from repression perpetrated by the

Pakistan times as a result of embarrassing questions raied by MPs or MPAs. The issue of economic disparity, for example, received official acceptability largely through the pressure brought about by parliamentary questions. It seems that parliamentary question has lost much of their its importance now. It has turned into more a routine matter and does not lead to executive action or stay of action. Discussions and adjournments are another device to ensure constituent interests but they are usually talked out because there is no practice of follow-up action. Letters of parliamentarians to the executive, or submissions by them, do not receive the kind of consideration that receives in advanced democracies. Overseeing the executive is very important in the interest of the constituents.

We have started

Parliamentary Committees but being referred to people. The message here is for their composition, terms of

The change of autocratic practices and ensuring bureaucratic accountability are the challenges before our parliamentarians. But this will require patience; the culture of parliamentary democracy or, for that matter, the democratic culture is new to us and it will take time to take roots.

frame of the Indian Civil Service was set up in 1793, more than half a century before UK established career civil service in a limited form in 1853. The system of legislation by ordinances and executive orders (which is substantially different from delegated legislation) is in our nature; even now we seem to prefer ordinances to legislative bills. The division of functions and responsibilities of various executive branches is done by the executive without reference to parliament — a practice not even followed by the chief executive in USA. A ministry is established or a directorate is abolished or an attached office is created or merged without even the knowledge of parliamentarians. This was the procedure followed by rulers not responsible to parliament or by the so-called elected leaders who drew power from sources other than people's will. The change of such autocratic practices and ensuring bureaucratic accountability are

beginning of the year is revised drastically during the year without much discussion in parliament and is approved virtually without consideration while the new budget for the following year is presented There is also the dictatorial provision of budget by ordinance. In the exercise of the time-honoured responsibility of budget supervision our parliament performs only a limited role. There is also very little of development dialogue in which the constituents have the greatest interest. These are areas needing urgent change to allow parliamentarians to discharge their due responsibility.

Parliamentarians have special duty to perform on behalf of their constituents whom they represent. Surely interests of individuals need be subordinated to national interests or modified to reflect party programmes. At the same time it should be remembered that it is public opinion, i.e. views of constituents from across the country, which has

coercive authorities of public administration parliamentarian has to care a lot more for his constituents because the latter has very little access to other avenues of redress. We do not have local governments worth the name to whom constituents can go for help. Our judiciary in not independent to the extent necessary for inspiring confidence in seeking redress from it. Criminal justice, in the first instance, is almost completely administered by executive officers and constituents seeking criminal justice or relief from repression by criminal investigators (i.e. the police force) crowd on the parliamentarians. The burden is too great partly also because of lack of education of the constituents. They usually do not know what service or favour

to seek and how to seek it. To look after the interests of the constituents a useful device in the past was the parliamentary questions. Many of us are aware of actions taken or decisions changed in

reference and system of hearings are highly inadequate. Questions about chairmanship and open hearings have been raised. Other issues of concern are the authority of the Committees, the subjects which the Committees can look into. as well as the regular business of the Committees. The chairmanship should go to MPs of the treasury bench other than the ministers if not to the members of the opposition. The hearings should be public with provision for close hearings when necessary. Committees should invariably process legislation but equal importance should be given to supervision of executive actions and ensuring the accountability of the executive. Periodic reports on activities, annual reports, special topics of interest to the members, issues of bilateral or international relations and such other matters should be discussed in the Committees. There should be staff support for the Committees so that they indeed, can function effectively.

rest of the country from its due share. There is also this tendency with powerful civil and military officials who start cultivating their constituencies with an eye to seeking election at a future date. These are clear cases of public disservice and misuse of power. There is flagrant deviation from the pledge of national service only with a view to gaining unfair personal advantage. There should really be provision for penalising such cases. Constituents' wishes are increasingly becoming very crucial Communication revolution has made people much more politically conscious and active. Referendum has become a common means of ascertaining people's views and more issues are increasingly

parliamentarians to give added

attention to constituents'

interests. A reference to people's vigilance is warranted because it is the best guarantee for responsible government. While parliament must assert in its traditional work of legislation protection of rights, budget control, overseeing of economic activities and supervision of the executive, there is no denying the fact that accountability of government (i e. democracy) can be substantially improved by spread of education and growth of independent press. In Kerala state of India governance is perhaps the most responsible as well as responsive. The reason is over ninety percent literacy and the largest circulation of newspapers in the state. In that state the circulation of newspapers is the highest in the country, nearly one for every thirty people. The level of public vigilance is very high and this acts as the tonic in a state which carries a huge burden of ideological baggage Parliamentarians are likely to better discharge their responsibilities if the media function more vigorously and

WENTY-THREE years ago, would-be Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir

Mohamad wrote a book that sought to find the reasons for the economic backwardness and disadvantaged position of the Malays in their own land. The Malays, the doctor-

politician offered in his The Malay Dilemma, were weaklings owing to a combination of heredity and environment.

The solution he suggested was a system of protection that would produce a new breed of Malay capitalists able to stand on their feet and elevate the Malays to the status of other economically dominant races.

The book's genetic explanation for Malay inferiority, which many thought crass and scientifically unacceptable, got Mahathir expelled from the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the dominant Malay political party in the National Front coalition government. The Malay Dilemma was banned for several years.

But Mahathir's ideas found their way into Malaysia's socalled bumiputra (sons of the soil) policy, a affirmative action programme designed to advance the status of Malays, the majority race in this ethnically di-

verse country. And though the jury is still out 20 years later on the 'national' economic policy' (NEP) favouring bumiputras, the conspicuous presence of the hitherto rural Malays in business and professional activities seldom associated with Malays is largely a byproduct of that pro-

Malaysia: Enter the New Malay Their rise in Malaysia's politics and social Now social scientists and standing are changing the Malays. Leah

politicians are talking about the emergence of a 'New Malay' who seems to have chucked off the historic sense of economic deprivation and political insecurity and replaced it with a new confidence.

challenges before

Under the bumiputra policy, Malays enjoyed favourable treatment for housing, university education and employment over the Chinese and Indian

More important, the government itself established public enterprises to create a large number of Malay entrepreneurs and effect the transfer of the country's corporate wealth to the bumiputra community.

The Malay community has since experienced a surge in living standards — and in corporate earnings most evident in the array of late-model European luxury cars clogging Kuala Lumpur's modern roads.

But social scientists also point to a perceptible change in political attitudes. For example, the NEP was superseded by the national development policy (NDP) in 1991, which gives some emphasis to the economic development of non-bumiputra groups without too much protest from Malay nationalist

Of even greater interest, according to Rustam Sani, senior fellow at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies

from Kuala Lumpur (ISIS) in Kuala Lumpur, are the changes in perception UMNO on

Makabenta of Inter Press Service reports

'identity' "UMNO has become less exclusive, the party has accepted non-Muslim bumiputras in Sabah (East Malaysia) a members," Rustam said. "Recently, there have been suggestions to accept ethnic Portuguese from Malacca and the Straits Chinese as full members of the

what constitutes Malay

The 12,000 Portuguese in Malaysia are descendants of the Iberian conquerors of the Malacca kingdom and trading port that they occupied from 1511 to 1641.

The Straits Chinese are

scions of early Chinese settlers in the British colonies of Malacca and Penang who intermarried with Malay women and assimilated into the local Malay culture. As he did in 1970, Mahathir

the theoretician has come forward refine the theme further in keeping with the changes in the international political and economic order.

Presenting his vision of a fully developed nation by the year 2020 in a 1991 address.

Mahathir said there was a need to create a "new.Malay and bumiputra race" culturally and psychologically prepared for the

21st century. He said the Malays should strive to be an ethnic group "whose culture is in keeping with the times, who is capable of facing all challenges, who is prepared to compete without enjoying special privileges, who is educated and learned, sincere, disciplined, trustworthy and able"

The new Malay was adopted as a slogan of sorts by some politicians aspiring for senior leadership status in UMNO in the November party elections.

Offering themselves as the "voice and conscience of the new Malay", they have changed the character of UMNO politics with their brash ways and new money. The 'New Malay team represented by Anwar Ibrahim swept the party polls.

But some of the changes they have introduced are not to the liking of the old guard in UMNO, a party that started out as an organisation of farmers and teachers but is now in danger of being swamped by the "new money culture of the new

also a new breed of Malay religious leaders, scientists, academicians, artists and technocrats. Some critics have charged that the concept conveyed a new breed of Malays who were

But Muhammad Taib, chief minister of Selangor state one of be really successful." the new vice president has

corrupt, immoral and deceiv-

"The concept is clear and the only barrier is the Malays themselves," said Muhammad. "They must change their attitude and realise that they have much to learn before they can claim to

public awareness is of high

said the aim is not merely to

create Malay corporate men but

OPINION

The Politics of Hatred The latest Awami League All are political messages for

resolutions on its planned cam- the high brows and professional zens, and the voters are all familiar with this type of mindless approach or "solutions" for the last 18 years. The old wine in the 'old' bottle.

and many new, which have impress those who count. lately cropped up; not due to the multi-headed problems.

the large number of development activities awaiting the patronization of the political leaders (whether in power or not), and on economy, employment, leads nowhere. A congenial at-(as I am doing!), but what is the when it comes into power, desired level of criticism for pumped up with so much harunning the country? Any citi- tred in their system! zen or group alone cannot run' the country. We expect profes- sive but firm politics, based on sional standard and code of moral values and not on mateethics if we are to entrust the rialism or party gain? This phigovernance of the country to a losophy is simply non-existent political party. Will the AL issue in the country. It is all passion a check-list how to rate a politi- and hatred, listening to the po-

In fact there is hardly any crossings. message for the public, namely

movements appears to be to come to power in a non-transthe point that the party is in prayer includes all the parties). distress, and the power and clout of the party has to be strengthened by any means.

paign of service to the nation is political workers. What is the once again confined exclusively message for those who are not to hateful criticism of the party interested in politics and for in power; what is wrong with it, those who do not wish to take how to teach it a lesson, and an active part in politics? These how to bring it down. There is are vital basic questions to be nothing new in this stereotype addressed at the lowest nonapproach, and the public, citi- professional level. The country cannot be governed simply by finding faults. Till today the AL has no

shadow cabinet to whom questions could be directed. The Has this great political party members of the cabinet should run out of ideas? Another point be visible to face the press and to be noted is that the AL policy answer questions and take part makers have nothing to say on in debates defending their tackling the various ills of the stands, armed with data. Vague fast changing society, some old, accusations and charges do not

What is most distressing to BNP's mismanagement, but for note is that the campaigns are the simple truth that globally based on hatred, directed at the society is changing fast, and opposing parties rather than at one single party cannot solve the issues, regardless of who are running the government. Why point to a single alleged The philosophy of hated rebounds, and creates bifurca-The AL has nothing to say on tions and groups (that is why we have several dozen political parties). Consensus is impossible in this vile atmosphere. It is easy to be sharp-tongued, but it education, and so many other mosphere is never sought. It is fields. Every citizen can criticize rather frightening to visualize loudly at his or her own level what the AL would do if and

Why we cannot have persualitical speeches at the street

I would not trust leaders the man in the street and the who are full of hatred, and findrural folks. All campaigns are ing fault with others all the metropolitan-oriented, seeking time; full of vague promises to draw attention in Dhaka, by with no clear, practical, and any means, including violence, transparent action plans. The indiscipline, hartals - all in the air is full of blank fires. There name of so-called "movements" should be some method in the from time to time, to disrupt the madness of solving the counordinary and routine life of the try's problems. Empty drums innocent citizens. We are not sound much, and live bullets being allowed to live a "normal" nowadays make more noise. Perhaps the general standard of The purpose of all such the society is such that we deserve all this punishment. Lord, deliver us from those who canparent manner. The stress is on not see the true path (this

> Cynical citizen Dhaka

Freedom of press

Sir, These days some of us talk loudly about freedom of press and accountability of the government. But in practice both the freedom of press and accountability appear to be lifeless and without any light for obvious reasons.

From time to time we read many crucial reports, editorial comments and letters in the national dailies regarding various lapses, omissions, corruption and irregularities committed in different government offices and public sector corporations. It is indeed good to have freedom of press to have those news published in the newspapers for the members of the public. But what about if the relevant authorities do not take any action and let the matter meet its natural death silently?

We observe that each ministry, government department and public sector corporation has an army of information officers/public relations officers but they perhaps seldom bother to take action, clarify, contradict or send rejoinder on any important news, crucial or adverse report, editorial comment and letters published in the national dailies.

We wonder what is the utility and usefulness of our freedom of press and why some of us

boast of accountability if our democratic government maintains a mum on matters which need clarification by the members of the public?

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203

Dilkusha road

Sir, This is the road from the American Express Bank toward Rajuk and also the two major connecting roads i.e. 2nd turn to Shadharan Bima Shadan and the 3rd turn to Purbani Annex Building. This is the most important road along the northern side of Bangabhaban. At present it has become too tough to walk even by this road, coverless drains make much narrow the footpaths. Two person cannot walk side by side. Most important offices like bank, insurance, foreign firms, govt office, show room, airlines, travel are situated on this most important Dilkusha road.

For several years this road has not been repaired, even there is no sign of any road carpeting, while thousand of rickshaws, cars, light and heavy vehicles have to ply everyday on this road.

I, on behalf of the Dilkusha Commercial Area dwellers pray and hope that the concerned authority should take proper action at the earliest to give us S M Khalid

76. Dilkusha C/A, Dhaka

Controlling rickshaws

Sir, Reference Government's reported decision to ban the manufacturing of cycle rickshaws in the metropolitan area, to curb the traffic congestion in the city due to plying of too many rickshaws, the expected solution looks like trying to touch the nose with the finger coming from behind the head.

Ordinary logic says it means that the current number of rickshaws are not going to be reduced; or this large number does not cause traffic problem. There are several fallacies in the step taken.

The number of rickshaws can be immediately reduced by one third by a few simple steps (a) Detect and confiscate the

unauthorized rickshaws; and heavily fine the owners. Some of the vehicles probably have duplicate numbers, and some fake. The majority of the owners are certainly not poor; and secondly, the poor can and do commit crimes, so let us not be sentimental about duties and obligations. The problem -

which is not in the manufacturing sector — is that the allegedly corrupt checkers will not carry out both or either of these duties conscientiously. Who will supervise the supervisors? The problem is social and moral, which has assumed epidemic proportion in the society. We should not dump all the blame on the rickshaws. The policy makers have to be tough to restore some civic sense.

(b) Challan the drivers without licence (including the underage drivers). The rickshaw samities may be advised to assist the members with the training aspects, in coordination with the authorities.

The solutions lie in the domain of control and regulation; so the manufacturing sector should not be made the scapegoat, as manufacturing depends on the demand and supply ra-

The ruling party appears to be suffering from popularity syndrome. Where there is a will, there is a way. Here the will is lacking, as priority has been accorded to other "popular" options. There is the same indecisiveness in regard to campus violence.

What we need is no-nonsense governance.

Alif Zabr Dhaka