

## Services Reorganisation Preferably by Consensus

There are some not very self-satisfying characteristic features about the manner in which we have addressed the task of reorganising our outmoded spokes-of-a-wheel bureaucratic system. Initially we had shown signs of self-driven initiatives but losing our way through a maze of half-hearted efforts we seem now to be goaded in this by the donor community. It is the latter who are now pointing to the unfinished job urging us to complete it soon, without much ado.

The second notable feature of the endeavour is that in the preparation of the various review papers, reports and recommendations relating to services reorganisation we have had to rely heavily on those who ideally should be affected by the changes being sought in the administrative structure. True, some retired civil servants had been associated with the job when successive post-independence governments had set up their commissions for the purpose. But they after all were the products of the processes they had been through, and to that extent, could have been biased. We are only presuming this, although as a safe bet, because many of the Commissions' recommendations were not even made fully public, far less implemented.

At any rate, insofar as the latter-day versions are concerned, like for instance, the World Bank-induced Public Administration Efficiency Study (PAES) or for that matter the UNDP-conducted Public Administration Sector Study, it is the serving insiders who were the principal authors of the study. What is more to the point is that it is they who were to implement it. The 1989 PAES review was stalled by the then government, let alone the implementation of the suggestions contained therein. The UNDP report is lying with the BNP government together with recommendations that the committee of four secretaries have submitted on the basis of their study of the British administrative system.

The donor point of view about lack of outside inputs in the reform process, as underscored at the meeting held between the Bangladesh establishment secretary and the consortium members in the city last Thursday finds support, in hindsight, in an editorial comment we made the other day about calling of shots by top-notch bureaucrats. We will go beyond this to suggest that apart from the association of technocrats with the process we would like open discussions to take place on the subject. We certainly do not want reform delivered by any particular interest group or groups. A national consensus must be evolved on the question of administrative reform to ensure both its implementation and continuity. The best venue to guarantee all this is provided by the Parliament itself in the sense that a bill drafted by a prior bi-partisan understanding may be put through House and enacted as law. This is not asking too much because the opposition parties have a stake as they would be equal beneficiaries of restructured permanent civil services. Adoption of this course will be all the more logical inasmuch as the alternative to this would be going back to the time when with each changing of the guard there was fiddling with the services of the Republic.

## For a Fairer World — Genderwise

Today is the International Women's Day. Women's rights activists would have a field day today holding meetings and rallies all over the globe. As the day has special significance for us in Bangladesh, how we wish the whole society joined in the proceedings of the day. The absolutely untenable state of gender exploitation, the abject shame of woman's lowly place in world society is in fact far from a sectarian problem. It is a problem of the whole human species and the gender imbalance weighting the society against women these past few thousand years has positively been degenerative of the soul of the humankind. If this is first the call of duty for women themselves to wake up to their demeaning condition and fight for setting it right, it is equally the responsibility of men to march abreast of their mothers and sisters and wives in the same cause. Not as a kindly act in sympathy but in enlightened self-interest they must do their bit in freeing themselves from the constrictions that enslavement of women had resulting in.

In Bangladesh we had never had it so bad in the matter of gender inhumanity. One cow is being smuggled in at the price of two women smuggled out. What can be the figure of all such all over the globe? After all even in Europe after the collapse of the Soviets flesh has never been as cheap as that of our mothers and sisters.

For those unable to escape to a foreign hell, the hearth has been rendered as infernal, thanks to the sudden spurt in the activity of the *fatwabaz* — the dealers in *fatwas* or pseudo-religious denunciations lately targetted solely on women. Very recently the zealots have found a new target — the NGOs. But for the same reason — women. The NGOs are pushing the women of the villages beyond their God-ordained station — a satanic act for all the local anti-social bigots. Bashing wives and domestic helps with frequent cases of acid throwing thrown in has hit a crescendo and the righteous dealers of retribution on women are finding this ever so difficult because of NGOs and women's rights activists. Hence the expression of wrath coming so often as a visitation.

If all this has to be resisted and positively got rid of as if it were evil incarnate, the meaning of all such persecution lies in the recent unmistakable assertion of woman as a worker — an earner of bread for the family. All tidings of humiliation and exploitation do pale before this single positive development. Women's entry into the labour market in a big way was possible as they could be hired for half it took to hire men. Now that women have established themselves as always turning in better output than man, there shouldn't be anymore the question of paying them less. Equal wage for women for equal work — this cause is begging to be taken up in all earnest not only by women's rights activists but by all trade unions. The trade unions would do themselves immense good by timely embracing this good cause.

Our congratulations of the day to all who join the battle for a fairer world-genderwise.

As the rest of the world is coming out of a slow procrustinating escape from the most sustained deep rooted recession of the century, Bangladesh lies on the threshold of an economic boom which may transform this wretched and condemned to be the permanent poorest country of the world; to a self-relying, self-sustaining, and a politically viable member of the community of nations.

However, this optimism must be evaluated in the right perspective and a clear perception of both political and economic objectives must be developed to initiate policies and to galvanize human and financial resources. It may be necessary to look back, and understand some of the sustained incongruities in the political leadership and in the management of the economy.

One of the most essential objectives for any leadership of an emerging nation is to unify the nation for a common goal which, particularly in Bangladesh, successive leaderships and governments failed even to acknowledge.

The post-liberation government was faced with many problems and it immediately set out to solve all problems within the life-time of the first Parliament without fixing any priorities or deciding on the compelling current needs. The problems at that time were mainly political as institutional structuring of the economy needed political definition and the acquiescence of a unified nation.

Instead the political leadership polarized and divided the war ravaged nation. The leadership's claim to have singularly achieved the liberation was challenged and later a series of ruthless and incoherent acts were committed. This political malfunctioning deprived the nation from developing any stability in politics and structuring of economic management. The vacuum created in politics and in the economy allowed various vested groups sponsored by external sources to replace national cause.

The leadership to-date has failed either to understand or to appreciate the underlying need for a unifying nation. Most of them suffers from conceit, sycophancy, self-deceiving ego-boasting and are regularly and consistently catered for by the self-serving conduit system. Almost all observers have so far focused on this phenomenon on and attributed the cause to corruption.

But corruption as such is not a deterrent or hindrance to development or to efficient management of the economy. In any emerging nation where traditional sources of capital or established market are a new experience, corruption within

some framework may serve as an impetus to savings, and productivity. Even during the industrial revolution and in post second world war rehabilitation programmes in Europe and in Japan corruption within certain limits motivated to accentuate the market for capital and trade. Corruption is even justified when cohesion of the market becomes the objective and intent is manifest in sustained investments and expansion.

Politics which should have mobilized the majority opinion in favour of socially acceptable administrative structures where people had the scope to identify their needs for participating in the process of development, was deliberately avoided and instead colonial administrative structure was preferred without heeding the aspirations of the millions and thus condemning them to live under sub-human conditions. The vast majority of people in Bangladesh survive in spite of the government and without any contact with the adminis-

trative set-up. They toil from sunrise to sunset meeting their needs with humble ways without any knowledge of the concern raised for them outside Bangladesh. In fact they have no knowledge of the handful of vested, self-serving politicians and bureaucrats displaying the pitiful skeletons of the people to arouse compassion among decent taxpayers of other nations. Little do the donor citizens know that these poor people continually make their living on their own. It is a pity that the politicians chose to denigrate their own people instead of enhancing their image. Only lack of identity, pride and commitment to the future generation when coupled with corruption will condemn a nation to a 'bottomless basket'.

The attitude of all governments, without any exception since the liberation of Bangladesh remained the same. A self-deceiving ruling class emerged with ruthless streak for plundering and exploitation. The vast majority of the people resigned to suffer under the hands of these vested groups compounded by the vagaries of Nature.

This polarization was not caused by any political or ideological divide, it simply came about due to lack of political understanding and by the personal cult created by the leadership. Management of the

non political Finance Minister who was either a retired bureaucrat or an academician with no political commitment or sense of care for the ordinary people. The concept persisted even after the liberation of Bangladesh. Since the liberation, with the exception of one Finance Minister all other Finance Ministers were chosen from the pool of ex-bureaucrats or so called technocrats. If the economic achievements and the projected plans are the evidence of their ability and performance, an untrained infant could have performed better.

Against this background if one is able to diagnose the symptoms and prescribe a solution, one would definitely suggest to the political leadership to take into account the changing dynamics in the socio-political field and develop the perceived objectives of the nation with which majority of the people will not have difficulty to identify, and be willing to commit themselves to the successful fruition of the objectives.

It is not enough to celebrate the day of the liberation or give speeches on such occasions which may establish a false sense of pride, but will not serve the goal to establish freedom. A nation without freedom can not become politically viable nor can it establish a free market.

The fundamental pre-re-

# Boom Awaits Bangladesh

by KB Ahmed

economy was left, in the hands of indenting agents, donor interests and to the ill prepared planners.

It is somehow understood within the context of Bangladesh that the management of the economy should be separated from the perceived political objectives, and that process of development need not require any political cohesion. The concept was initiated during the time of Pakistani President Ayub Khan, by some over ambitious bureaucrats to establish an ongoing domination for themselves in the functioning of the government. The old army general and his civilian collaborators satisfied themselves with titular projection of their images and with the meagre share of the loot. The public at large hyped with the cause of Islam and were duped into continual sufferings.

In the government, the politicians were made to convince themselves to accept a

unites to establishing freedom or free market is the establishment and maintenance of law and order in the country. This responsibility lies only with the government and successive governments failed miserably to discharge their duties in this respect. On the contrary, they all are accused of deliberately undermining normalcy and maintenance of law and order.

Market always had to operate under extra-ordinary situation. Investors, managers, workers, and the consumers had to be content with uncertainties, incongruities, and insecurities.

Planning priorities were at first established by the academician according to their personal fancy for theoretical concepts which were later recast by the fancy of the donor interests and eventually overcome by shrewd manipulation by the indenting agents.

A perpetual state of instability forced all governments to

tor's needs. Private investors were not only dependent on the administrative system for access to capital, they were also restricted to selective investments.

In such circumstances, the optimism for boom is perhaps a dichotomy, but it does potentially exist.

It all started with the recent GATT agreement in which consumers in the industrially developed nations has been given a greater choice in the market for goods and services. Technology was already waiting in the wings to force the market to adopt greater speed, faster turnover, quicker and bigger return on capital. Capital has almost turned into a liquid form and moves swiftly through electronic means to far reaching markets. The regulation for capital movements, investments and market control are being waived under common agreement of many nations. Tariff threshold is lowered and direct taxation is about to be replaced by consumption based sur-charges.

Under these conditions what should a country like Bangladesh do? Bangladesh as a nation enjoys a unique status as a producing country, as most of the donor nations have already agreed to give special dispensation to the poorest countries to gain access to their markets. Fortunately among the poorest countries Bangladesh is marginally better off with her infrastructures in the field of transportation, manpower and education. A common understanding of all political forces may transform the entrepreneurs in Bangladesh in to an aggressive mode.

There are two options open for the investors and traders in Bangladesh. One is to pursue the so called experts and leaders in changing the administrative structures and create nationwide initiative to capture the market overseas; or completely ignore the Establishment and mobilize resources and production within a framework of an alternative market.

In setting up an alternative market, thanks to the addition of electronic technology and speedier capital movement, investors and traders can by pass the establishment completely. Any benefit in terms of turnover, volume, profits, employment, balance of trade and balance of payment may not directly come to the treasury, but the whole nation can not let this opportunity pass for

the sake of some incompetent, self seeking politicians and conceited bureaucrats. However, if in the future, better groups of politicians and bureaucrats favour the luck of this nation, the scope to expand the market will be better.

All governments have failed in Bangladesh irrespective of ideology and talents and in spite of supports from the very generous donors. They all have failed very miserably to discharge very fundamental responsibilities and they have failed to acknowledge their failures. They were made fools of by bureaucrats, indenting agents and by the market forces. They behaved without any sense of history and were imbued with a sense of vain display of self images.

It is time for all of us to raise our hands and heads and ask ourselves how long these incongruities, insecurities and uncertainties would be tolerated. It is time to do something about this. If one is wondering how to do something without being seditious, I suggest you should put your mind to undertaking all those activities in which you do not need your government's assistance.

You need simply access to the market; which is secured in the developed world by the consumers' choice. You only need to offer your product or your services in competitive terms, the consumer has no prejudice against any competition. The capital is now cheaper and efficiently available in the international market as long as the produce and the services can compete in the international market. One will need a good idea. One will also convincingly need a good management free from brothers, cousins, brothers-in-law and dead-weights. One will need efficiency and consistency. Above all one needs a good intent.

Industrialized countries have freed themselves from bureaucratic shackles and political exploitation or at least they have made them more publicly accountable by freeing the market.

One may not be in a position to free oneself in Bangladesh now, but at least one can join the big international free market. Quite apart from the tiny budget of donor-sponsored 1.5 billion US Dollars, an international market of 30 trillion US Dollars turn-over per year awaits Bangladesh.

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## Communities Run Own Media Facilities

Linda Bolldo writes from Basco, Philippines

'Tambuli' tries to make up for the indifference of big media groups to small community concerns

establishments based mainly in major urban centres. By the time the project winds down in 1996, at least 12 'Tambuli' centres will have been set up.

Each 'Tambuli' site consists of an area of about 10 to 30 square kilometres with a population from 10,000 to 100,000. Priority is given to areas which are isolated by mountains, sea or rugged terrain.

'Tambuli' tries to fill the gap caused by the indifference of big media organisations to the requirements of rural community development.

The plan is to develop FM, radio stations and local newspaper in 12 economically depressed communities or isolated islands, as the case may be, says Louie Tabing, project manager who is currently national chairman of the Philippine Foundation of Rural Broadcasters.

These stations and the

newspapers will then be used to broadcast and publish information relevant to the local populations and which will enable them to develop, build and improve their living standards.

'Tambuli' serves the information and development needs of small villages by highlighting the local people's main concerns and goals. It intends to harness fully the potential of the information media to advance the goal of self-reliant development in remote areas that have little access to major agents of development.

The project allows for some commercial advertising, revenues from which are used for the maintenance and development of the facilities and the training of personnel. The advertisements are chosen on the bases of the product's relevance to the community and its impact on the environment.

The key to the US\$4.2 million project, which is supported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), is community participation. The people themselves plan an decide what to do.

In fact, a key consideration in the selection of project sites is the willingness shown by villagers to provide some of the resources, such as land and building for the community centre which will house the communication facility. Communities which already have strong social institutions or which show a great potential for organising such institutions are given priority to ensure the success and sustainability of the project.

To provide leadership for the venture, a multi-sectoral community media council is formed at the community level. The council, as far as possible, is based on existing social organisations.

Major community groups —

farmers, fishermen, youth, women, ethnic communities, small entrepreneurs, professionals, artisans etc — are represented in the council as much as possible.

The council determines the project's objectives and determines the ways of using communication to attain those objectives. Eventually, the council will become the foundation for a cooperative form of ownership for the community centre and radio station and newspaper.

Expert support and advice is provided by the 'Tambuli' management team and senior advisory panel, both bodies composed of representatives of major media groups, international organisations, the government, private sectors and the academe.

Choy Arnaldo, chief of the communication development section for UNESCO's communication division, said, 'This project is original. But some people think it won't come off. I think the real challenge is with the communities themselves, because all development is really people accepting changes and changing their lives.'

— Dephnews Asia

## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

T & T Deptt

Sir, Upon an urgent necessity to make an overseas call to my daughter living in New York, I tried to book an overseas call and tried the Nos. 152,162, 402199, 501777, 244968, 244969, 319226, 608080, 383016, 413744 one after another at an interval of 1/2 to 1 minute from 6.50 am to 8.15 am. Curiously enough not a single of the above numbers responded to any of my numerous calls. On the other hand, during this tedious exercise, although I was very much particular in dialing the number, but to my misfortune 3 of my calls went to private residence where some female children said that those were Bashes.

Thus being a failure, I con-

tacted the Mirpur Tel 382121 who responded and was good enough to give me No. 402999, 152-156 and 162-166, and requested me to try again and said there was no reason why the said numbers would not respond, since there were men engaged in roster duty round the clock in those numbers. As advised by him I tried those numbers again and again but to my utter misfortune and dismay, I did not succeed in booking a call.

My question is, there may be temporary absence of any individual for a brief period for one might require to attend call of nature or anything whatsoever. But my sad experience is that during this one hour 25 minutes there was none to respond from any of

the above telephones.

We are often told that the T & T Deptt has been making all round efforts to bring qualitative improvement. Is it a sample of such dynamism?

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Tourism industry

Sir, Much has been written about the importance of tourism as an industry and many are the promises for development of tourist spots and infrastructures in Bangladesh.

The concerned ministries and the national tourism organisation — the BPC — have regularly observed 'Tourism Week' and other activities including designing printed material to attract foreigners, especially from the western world. The successive administrations have expressed their desires to improve and develop tourism industry. Even private organisation like A. Intraco (BD) Ltd under their resourceful chairman, Hakim Ali, have tried to invest and invite

tourists to this country.

However, tourism is still in its infancy in Bangladesh. A few foreigners who come and stay overnight are mostly on transit during their tour of neighbouring countries; some on business and others purely for religious requirements. Why is our tourism industry in such a mess? What are the exact causes for our failure?

It has been acknowledged that tourists love to visit odd places during inclement weather, sometimes desiring to witness alien cultures and life-styles, especially in their primitive original ways.

Therefore, what distracts them? Are there any traps? To my mind, the first one is the dodgy food. Messing here has never been upto any standard — both from platable and hygienic points of view. Even the star hotels are often not as much hygienic. Food elsewhere, outside the metropolis is rather pathetic, if available.

Water, the life is retaining fluid, is dangerous even for the locals. Only recently that we

find the nectar in the large cities.

Take the case of communication — none of our transportation systems — air, land or waterways — is regular, presentable and as such safe. Our national flag-carrier, Biman has a reputation not conducive enough to attract international passengers. Transports on road and/or water ways are hazardous and tourist spots meant for fun and leisure are not always safe. The working hours and holidays practised by us deter any quick communication with agents in the Far East and Far West.

Telecommunication is yet in its infancy to effect speedy link with clients and carriers and therefore, no urgent feedback of information and confirmation is possible. The government have not introduced diversity or encouraged sufficiently the participation of private enterprisers in the field, to ensure competition.

Then comes the climate of cliches. No one is interested for general or overall improvement to existing condi-

tion as regards treatment to the visitors. Take the people, for example, in their pursuit for fun — they remain in hot chase at times making the visitors uneasy and uncomfortable.

Parjaton publications and brochures, do not give a very bright impression either.

Airport treatments have rather scared many from returning or recommending.

Minimum environmental requirements that could improve the countryside are missing; most of the roads and verges are littered with filth and leftovers.

A country and its people are far more than the sum of tourist spots and, therefore, the authorities and concerned persons everywhere must look for improvement of the conditions — making it conducive to the tourists — especially educating our people on ethics and behaviour.

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