

Tragi-Comical

Meaning all things to everybody the political confusion snow-balls. The Prime Minister's belated speech hasn't helped nor have the strikes. There is an all-pervasive feeling among the people of being somewhat unled and orphaned. It is almost as anarchic as an each-for-himself situation. A divided nation in the streets, at homes and in the work-places silently doing the rigours of an ego-ride the political leaders are still having and... that too, without any earthly reason.

People do not simply understand, far less appreciate, why they are still going their ways when everything is in hand to get their act together! A caretaker arrangement to oversee the general election has been agreed upon by all concerned, the PM has made clear the intention to make room for it 30 days ahead of polls and the no-strike insistence has been carefully avoided by the government lately. What is stopping the government and the opposition now to end their stand-off which has no basis to continue any further except for a fresh round of ego-maniac shadow-boxing? Don't they realise the child-play is being too costly for the people, the image of the leaders and that of the nation as a whole?

Want of initiative being taken at the right moment has brought us to this pass. A supremely avoidable agitational programme is on as political activists get unnecessarily wounded in a run-up to what looks like an equally dispensable round of street fights and blood-letting. A deceptive convictionlessness rends the air and, true to the nature of things, there is hardly anything to fight for and expend energy on, insofar as the caretaker issue goes.

Why there has to be any confusion now as to who should take the initiative? Of course it is the government that has to pick up the threads with the opposition from where these were left off.

Even what we normally understand to be threats, provocations and intimidations are fast losing meaning with us. These are getting lost on people who have come to think — because of the consensus that was all but reached — that these are hollow-sounding and so thoroughly unnecessary. Even bits and pieces of righteous anger cannot stand their ground now.

It looks and sounds as comical as the invention of the obvious in Rabindranath Tagore's *Juta Abishkar* — that you need a pair of shoes to cover your feet from the dusts. The solution to the political impasse is much too obvious and available, to be missed anymore. The comical can become roundly tragic if we continue to turn a blind to it. It is proportionately more of a tragedy than a comedy, as it is.

Russia's Booby-Trap

The Chechen fighters have been true to their words. Not only did the able-bodied vow to fight the Russians to the last, they have even succeeded in inflicting heavy casualties on the far superior Russian troops who almost looked like establishing control on Grozny, the Chechen capital but couldn't obviously do it. The presidential palace could be saved from falling in the hands of the Russian force. This is no mean achievement for the scantily equipped Chechen freedom fighters.

Continuous aerial bombardments and artillery fires may have turned Grozny into rubble but Chechen people's high-morale and patriotic zeal appear to be unruffled. Their shortage of arms and ammunition has been more than made up by this unflinching spirit. Unbelievable it may sound, but the fact is that the Russians have lost many of their men, tanks and armoured vehicles in a fight the Chechens consider a 'holy war'.

Evidently no one learns from history. Once the ideology — a binding force — that held the Soviet Union together had weakened from within, the republics parted their ways. The parting was more or less painless because force was not applied at the time. It is the same principle ought to hold good in determining the fate of the Chechen people. No amount of force can bring them to submission. Even if they can be militarily humbled for the time being, their subjugation cannot be ensured for all time to come. Chechnya may not have all the make-up of an Afghanistan, it still has the most important ingredient in its favour: a people united by the spirit of liberation.

The battle appears headed for more blood-letting on both sides. Chechnya being predominantly Muslim, may add another dimension to the world's understanding of the Russian assertion. The war must end yielding place to peaceful settlement.

Cold-spell Victims

The country is smarting under a cold-spell. But the northern parts of the country are hit the hardest. No less than 13 people died in just three days in that region. This is alarming news, particularly if we go by the weather forecast. This year, according to the forecast, will see the severest of cold waves in years and is likely to persist for a longer period.

Earlier, the same region had to undergo a drought spell lasting for the best part of the cultivation season. For the people dependent on agriculture, any such vagary brings all-round disaster for them. For, this renders them most vulnerable to diseases and climatic convulsions. The poor of society lose all resistance powers in the face of natural adversity. They are likely to be doubly affected now with the cold wave coming.

No wonder, therefore, that the Deputy Commissioners (DCs) of Panchagarh and Dinajpur have asked for 50,000 and 60,000 pieces of blankets from the concerned ministry to save the poor of that area. The DCs of other districts may soon follow suit. Now the question is whether cold waves are ever considered a natural calamity and urgent measures taken to deal with the crisis. The answer is likely to be in the negative. The reason why this is not treated as such is that cold waves do not wreak havoc as pronouncedly as a cyclone, flood or storm. But such reasoning is bound to be flawed.

Cold waves may not inflict damage to properties but surely they can have as telling an effect as other natural calamities. The fact that last-minute SOS signals are sent to Dhaka is a testimony to a casual approach to this natural hazard. First it has to be recognised as a natural calamity and then provisions made well in advance to deal with the situation.

Administrative Reform: For Service to People

by Wing Commander A M M Enayetullah (Retired)

Bangladesh sustained during all these eventful 23 years of political 'volcanos' and socio-economic 'earthquakes', gives us hope that it will not be difficult for them to adapt and do well under a different but better concept of the Services of Bangladesh with the true spirit of service to people.

Republic — the Constitution.

Public Service

In good old days public service was conceived in a limited sense. Postal service, the police, the PWD courts, providing street lighting and conservancy etc. were considered as public service. Should we now say that the concept of that kind of public service is a thing of the past? For, in the present day world, is not almost the whole government geared to public service? Is it not for this reason that every civil post in the government is placed in the Constitution under Part IX: The Services of Bangladesh? However, it is another matter that, while translating the English version of the Constitution into Bengali (but authenticating the Bengali version as the Master Document for interpretation in case of conflict between English and Bengali versions) certain words and expressions suffered distortion to such an extent that the very meaning of those words and expressions changed. Even the Supreme Court may find it difficult to differentiate between 'sheba' and 'karma' as they appear in the Bengali version. Similarly the meaning and approach to Public Service and Public Servant in Bengali appears to be more colonial than in the English version. Consequently, contrary to the basic concept in political philosophy, the public have become servants and the servants have become masters. If it is not corrected soon then the real masters may intervene to set things right at an opportune moment by taking law directly in their hands.

Reorganisation of Services

Keeping in view the terminologies used in the Constitution and the spirit behind those terminologies, reorganisation of the services of the Republic appears to be more appropriate than using extra-constitutional terms, such as administrative reform. Article 136 reads, "Provision may be made by law for the reorganisation of the services of the Republic by the creation, amalgamation or unification of services and such law may vary or revoke any condition of ser-

vice of a person employed in the service of the Republic." However, condition of service and reorganisation of services can be considered for revision only after removing certain conflicts in other parts of the Constitution. Article 55(2) reads, "The executive power of the Republic shall, in accordance with this Constitution, be exercised by or on the authority of the Prime Minister." Article 55(3) reads, "The Cabinet shall be collectively responsible to Parliament." But Article 55(4) reads, "All executive actions of the government shall be expressed to be taken in the name of the President." It is simply an imitation of British system where Her Majesty's Government rules and Her Majesty reigns. Although the People's Republic of Bangladesh is quite different from Her Majesty's United Kingdom, we seem to be pretending, that we follow Westminster type of government. Imagine a situation where the Queen of England is replaced by a President, who is elected by the British Parliament in fact nominated by the majority political party or to be exact, by the 'would-be' Leader of the House and the Prime Minister. The so-called Westminster concept would instantaneously vanish. In case of our Constitution, if Article 55(2) and 55(4) are read together it will mean that though the President does not have the authority to exercise the executive power of the Republic, it is made to appear that all orders are emanating from him.

In the Constitution or in practice, the Services of Bangladesh is like an enclave where neither the President reigns nor the Cabinet or Prime Minister rules. It implies that the Services can circumvent Parliament. Let us not look at our big neighbour because it may be too early to judge the impact of Hindu political heritage upon current problems of state. For the People's Republic of Bangladesh the very first action to be taken is to amend the Constitution Part IV: The Executive and Part IX: The Services of Bangladesh as well as the interrelated Articles and Clauses.

Public Service Commission

Article 137 reads, "Provision shall be made by law for establishing one or more Public Service Commissions for Bangladesh each of which shall consist of a Chairman and such other members as shall be prescribed by law." Regarding the functions of Public Service Commission Article 140 reads, "(a) to conduct tests and examinations for the selection of suitable persons for appointment to the service of the Republic; (b) to advise the President on any matter on which the Commission is consulted under clause (2) or any matter connected with its functions which is referred to the Commission by the President; (c) such other functions as may be prescribed by law." Evidently there is no bar in establishing another Public Service Commission to perform specific functions, as permitted by Article 140(c). The contention that the President shall be the protector of every person who holds any civil post in the service of the Republic vide Article 135(1) and (2), leaves strong doubt whether the government is of Cabinet type or Civil Service type. In fact, the Articles and clauses under Part IX: The Services of Bangladesh makes all types of government look alike and do alike: be it Cabinet type, Presidential type, or Martial Law type, so far the Services and their non-accountability is concerned.

There have not been any amendment in this part since 1972 except substituting High Court by Supreme Court to guarantee the position of the Chairman, Public Service Commission.

Types of Government: 1972-1994

One does not have to stretch his imagination to appreciate that actually the Services of Bangladesh have ruled (?) the country under a monolithic bureaucratic discipline irrespective of the types of government that we have seen since 1972. They continued the rule (?) in spite of several drastic changes in the country which have shown us

nine types of government so far, such as (i) Passive Cabinet type, of which the most popular and powerful political leader was the President himself who virtually steered the Cabinet, (ii) Cabinet type, of which the former President became the Prime Minister and head of government, (iii) Single Party Presidential type, when the same Prime Minister became President through the Fourth Amendment, (iv) Martial Law Government imposed by a civilian politician, (v) Multi-party Presidential type when the former Chief Martial Law Administrator-cum-President resigned from the Army and got elected as President, (vi) Martial Law Government imposed by the Chief of Army Staff by overthrowing elected government, (vii) Multi-party Politico-Military Presidential type when the Chief Martial Law Administrator resigned from the Army and got elected as President, (viii) Non-political Non-representative Bureaucratic type without any Council of Ministers, and (ix) Cabinet type. The fact that the Services of Bangladesh sustained during all these eventful 23 years of political 'volcanos' and socio-economic 'earthquakes', gives us hope that it will not be difficult for them to adapt and do well under a different but better concept of the Services of Bangladesh with the true spirit of service to people.

The Legacy

While discussing about the Services of Bangladesh, it is important that we trace the legacy of Civil Service, rather the Indian Civil Service, from British time. We must recall the famous speech that was delivered by Deshbandhu C R Das at a meeting held at Dhaka on 11 October 1917. He said, "It is the system which is responsible for the bad government of this country. Why is the system bad? It is for this that there is no responsibility. An English friend of mine has pointed out that: What are the Civil Servants to do? That are not responsible to the people. They have to take their orders from the Executive Council of Bengal. To whom are the

members of Executive Council responsible? Not to the people. They have got to take their orders from the Government of India. To whom is the Government of India responsible? Not to the people. They got to take their orders from the British Parliament...." Readers may note that this is what is called colonial, that we very often refer to. Before concluding, C R Das said, "We ought not to waste our energy any more in the discussion of the question whether this bureaucracy has succeeded or whether it has failed. It is an accepted fact that it has failed." (Deshbandhu Rachanas-amra, English section, page 26. This book was introduced by Rabindranath Tagore in 1925). As long as the then Indian Civil Service was on the 'horse back' holding the Union Jack high, it was different story.

In Bangladesh context, one may say that there is neither any Executive Council nor a colony-government like the Government of India of pre-'47 period. So where lies the problem? The answer is, even then the civil service is not responsible to the people or to the people's representatives and the Parliament. Article 55(3) of the Constitution says, that the Cabinet is collectively responsible to the Parliament. It means that the government located in individual ministry is not responsible to the Parliament for good or for bad performance. Here lies the crux of the problem because, (i) the Cabinet itself is functioning here like the 'Executive Council' which acts like a barrier in one sense and protective shield in another.

Such practice most often brings discredit to an otherwise credible Cabinet and rest of the government; (ii) performance of the civil servants within the ministry remains invisible, hence does not show up in actual perspective; (iii) consequently, the Cabinet remains under the threat of total gangrene. This is why every time we have seen in the past that the head of government accumulating all the discredits, and that individual ministries along with their civil servants escape wrath. Such situation is not conducive to good government as a whole. Therefore, when gangrene is detected at any place, it may become necessary to amputate certain parts with a view to prevent it from spreading.

counts is a poor and crying humanity. It cannot be managed ultimately.

Here I would like to conclude, with excerpts from a poem from The Daily Star Weekend Magazine (A Question, by Nazim Mahmood, Friday 23rd Sept. '94)

"Father often said:
Look at the light,
not at the darkness —
There's your emancipation.
.....
Papa, do you know
How awfully dark it is now
around me.
How obnoxious is the filth
and smut under my feet.
How small is my existence
with thousand walls within!
So long with your hand in
mine
Like a child walking step by
step
At last where I have arrived
at
Did you then tell a lie,
Papa?"

The Management Perspective : Bangladesh Scene

by Shahabuddin Mahtab

Unfortunately, our plans, programmes, rules, actions, revenue budgets, ADPs are all seem to be for the minuscule percentage of the privileged persons, to the total exclusion of almost the whole of the people.

President Nixon, then the most powerful man in the world, was not spared by his countrymen (though pardoned by his successor in office). If Bangladesh has to be spared many of the brutalities of many of the African nations, law must be blind. Unless the law of the land is allowed to take its hard and tortuous course, it appears to us, that it is too early in the day to talk of management and development. This vital issue of law and order must always have a front seat priority in agenda of the government, in all weeks and in all months. It is the supreme business of the government, with the full support of the sovereign parliament (it has to be allowed to do so if we believe in democracy). A government has to believe in complete transparency, or it loses its credibility and thereafter the right to rule.

Unfortunately, our plans, programmes, rules, actions, revenue budgets, ADPs are all seem to be for the minuscule percentage of the privileged

persons, to the total exclusion of almost the whole of the people.

The islands of atrocious luxury, in a sea of poverty cannot last. The rich have to earn their money by working hard, creating jobs for the people and wealth for the country. There are many qualified entrepreneurs in our country who can add to the national wealth. I know one entrepreneur, young and hard-working, who lives in a modest house in Dhaka, with his two small children. On business, I phoned him one morning at 8 am. As he took a little time to take the call, I asked him, "what were you doing?". He replied to me modestly that he was teaching his children, and this he does till 8-45 am in the morning, if the children are not at the school.

I have quite a number of nouveau rich nephews, who often complain, that I no longer visit them now a days (forgetting that they never come to my place anymore). Being offered a little respite

from the doctor's waiting room, I went to meet one of my nephews after about five years.

Luckily he was at home, but not quite alone. There were mostly acquaintances, who ostensibly were also very rich. I could not recognise my nephew even though he was only a generation away. At five feet two inches, he looked to weigh as much as 200 lbs, which was not really the look of a handsome man. The drawing room was full of imported Italian furnitures in all the grandeur and splendour. The chandeliers and the concealed air-conditioners gave the appearance of a super five-star hotel. The three tpa trolleys contained, Chinese, American, Italian and Continental snacks. Much to the annoyance of my nephew, I sipped from a glass of soft drink, which I really enjoyed after a gruelling hour at the doctor's waiting room. My nephew was kind enough to accompany me upto my vintage car. The poor fellow who was hardly forty, with all gray hairs,

walked like an old man of eighty.

This is perhaps a model of how the rich in our country now-a-days manage their affairs! Is this 'management' we talk about and look for? Certainly not, because "management" in true sense of the term should take care of both the 'self' and the 'society' and not eroding rationality of need and consumption.

With utmost humility we request our leadership to set examples of human values which really matter in life. The sands of time are really running out. A society of degraded values, where only unlimited and unparalleled consumerism

THERE has been an increasing feeling in the country, that the management of government affairs, private sector management, the running of the city corporations and the town municipalities are not going well. And for this management is responsible. To remove the bottlenecks, as perceived by the Government, there have been serious discussions at the highest policy levels for reforms and reorganisations in the Government.

The term 'system loss' originally came from the energy sector. It was made quite popular by the then Turkish Vice President of the World Bank, Mr Kara Osmangulu, and it is now on everybody's lip, as if, if only this is removed the situation can be improved. But let us say very clearly, that the prevalence of the "system loss" is only one truth of our inefficiency and ineptitude, nevertheless a noteworthy one.

To the Editor...

National outlook

Sir, As an humble citizen of the country I wish to express my inner feelings of agony and despair resulting from our political instability and lack of tolerance and fortitude in every sphere of national life.

In games and sports, our youths can achieve international recognition and support on account of their excellence, sporting spirit and positive emotional involvement in the outdoor activities and games such as cricket, soccer, hockey, basketball, shooting, athletics and water sports etc. There is no dearth of genuine sport lovers and fans in our country. Unfortunately, it is due to mutual mistrust and misunderstanding among the politicians on various national issues, that we are facing an acute problem in almost every sphere of our national life, which obviously includes sports.

It is seen now that the crisis of character and leadership is sapping much of our vitality and vision. It is high time for us to reassess ourselves without any emotion and biased outlook on the question of utilisation of youth development in the country. The guardians and the teachers are the key factors in altering the

attitudes of the politicians who are guiding the destiny of the nation. Our national glory and prestige could only be achieved if we are true to our commitment and conscience irrespective of parochial political outlook. The sooner we get rid of our narrowness and complexes the better will be our achievements in our national life like that of South Korea, Malaysia, Japan, South Africa, Germany etc.

Abul Ashraf Noor
Rabna

Politicians and people

Sir, The other day I read in a foreign journal that "Democracy cannot be restored to imposed on or given to a country that is not mature enough to adopt such a system." It appealed me as much as in the context of our country it is true.

Our politicians invariably has a double standard of morality. When in Govt they talk of some thing and when in Opposition, the reverse.

From the treatment now meted out by the Opposition to the Govt it can very well be said they are more guided by whims than reasons. This is very much an unfortunate state of affair in the parliamentary

history.

If all the leaders whether in Govt or in Opposition are real well-wishers of the people, they should have something common which should be people.

F M Rahman
Mirpur, Dhaka

Sub-let

Sir, Sub-letting a house seems to be a thriving business in Dhaka. A poor government employee would somehow manage to get a quarter allotted to his name and after getting possession he usually would sub-let a portion of his flat to augment his income.

Some owners of fax machines and telephones inviting private callers to use their telephone on payment of a charge higher than fixed by the T&T are earning profit. Some owners of dish-antenna are letting out lines on payment on rental basis to their benefit.

The footpath is no more a sidewalk for the pedestrians. It is continually being used by the shopkeepers. A portion of waiting shed at the bus stand has already been let out to the shopowners.

The public toilets cannot be used at a nominal charge also.

Somebody is there to collect tolls. The vacant land by the side of railway track has already been let out. In the district headquarters the vacant land of the big bungalows of the officials is also being allowed to be used on rental.

All these speak about the optimum utilisation of things. But my question is, whether the government is getting the revenue against 'utilisation' of all these things.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury
Kalabagan, Dhaka

Cleanliness

Sir, I went to the Registration Complex, Tejgaon for some personal need. But I am very much upset to see the whole atmosphere inside and outside the Complex. The government has done a good job by constructing a registration complex to house the various registration offices which were scattered all over Dhaka.

The idea and the plan is very good, but it is a irony of fate that we cannot keep the complex nice and clean due to lack of proper maintenance. I would, therefore, request the authority to look into the matter immediately.

Surajya Habib
Zigatola, Dhaka

OPINION
Implications of Frustrated Leadership

M M Ahmad

Bangladesh may be facing the perils of frustrated leadership in the political field. The setback to the national aspirations will be greater, proportionate to the strength of the party in the opposition, and the period it is out of power.

Such a party will not be operating from a position of strength. Instead of offering its energetic leadership to the people, it will seek strength and support from the masses, for its rejuvenation and survival as a potent opponent to replace the party in power. The majority of such voters are neither enlightened enough, nor have the economic reserve to face reverses, when the going is not good. Thus the flow of motivation will be in the reverse direction, the people charging the fagging leadership — not the usual formula for success.

Such a leadership will be operating, sometimes desperately, without a positive sense of national direction, transparent enough for the naive citizens to evoke the right motivation for supporting the campaign through thick and thin. The party will opt for popular ad hoc programmes or campaigns, which cannot stand up to the scrutiny of expert critics at the top level, inside or outside.

After a while this frustration will be transferred from the leaders to the man in the street, and more importantly,

to the party workers themselves. Such blind reliance and faith in the electorate means operating from a point of no return — always a risky move in politics, for a party long absent from wielding power.

Such a campaign, if planned as a joint front by several opposition parties, has the possibility of back-firing at odd moments. The alliance may stall and break up, offering advantages to the smaller parties of the alliance. Thus, for example, non-participation in by-elections in case of mass resignation cannot be taken for granted for all parties. As usual, the divide-and-rule strategy in politics will continue to be applied by the party in power.

The economics and the social and political infrastructure of the society do not encourage such adventurism in the developing countries, specially one reeling under a succession of changes of government for several decades, due to instability (political inaptitude) or military take-overs.

There is one more discouraging factor in frequent agitations: the sudden reaction due to political fatigue of the people acting as political fodder for two generations. The nation badly needs peaceful existence for a while, especially when the country is ready to take off economically after long periods of struggle.