

New Participatory Depth

In an atmosphere marked by an eagle-eyed vigil all around for any poll to be blemish-free, we are relieved to note that the Tongi municipal election passed off almost ideally.

The local people took charge here, their participation having been unprecedentedly intensive and deeply involved.

The presiding and polling officers were drawn from the community. Local volunteers helped the voters cast their ballots.

In purely technical matters concerning collection of data, preparation of ID cards and their issuance, the Tongi experiment certainly left room for improvement.

Without prejudice to the unresolved question of a neutral caretaker arrangement for the conduct of future national elections, may all concerned take note of the message from Tongi: there is no better guarantee for peaceful and fair polls than all-round public participation in them.

Oozing Catastrophic Stove

A gas-stove explosion killed a housewife and injured 14, two of them receiving first degree burns, in the Rampura area of the city on Tuesday.

Man has been using fire since Neanderthalensis — the species not quite Homo Sapiens but almost — first dared to use it to their own advantage.

No, our people have rather been very smart in many ways, specially in adapting themselves to motorised traffic and an array of technological era novelties.

Ethnic Cleansing Nearer Home

It is nothing if not a pogrom that is being mounted in Bombay. The parallel army of Bal Thackeray's goons are raiding Muslim residents' houses with police in tow and taking away males to unknown destinations.

What about the Shiv Sena's crime? This is in fact a far more complicated field than even the Bosnia-Serbia situation.

Communal relationship is a very delicately balanced problem both within the states of this region as well as across it.

Even her detractors do not attempt to deny that Ms Benazir is a charismatic figure tailor-made to exploit the best of the western media.

Ms Benazir's festering problem is Karachi, Pakistan's major and only port city. While every shade of public opinion recognizes that it is imperative to restore democracy at the grassroots level, she was recently quoted in an interview to Newsweek as dismissing the Local Bodies election option in Karachi for two or three years.

Unfortunately since her electoral base is in rural Sindh, the PPP is heavily dependant upon the quota system to safeguard the interests of its prized constituents, that is directly in confrontation to the merit factor which is the main component of the urban-based MQM platform.

While the ideological divide is such that though a temporary marriage of convenience is possible, Rudyard Kipling's 'the twin shall never meet' adequately describes the possibility of a MQM-PPP rapprochement.

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The Global Financial Casino

The collapse of the British merchant bank Barings PLC is the latest upheaval in world capital markets. It calls for new regulations to prevent the global financial casino from spinning out of control, says economist Hazel Henderson in this exclusive Inter Press Service column.

The world has entered what might be called an Era of Global Economic Warfare in which previous economic models are obsolete, and new regulations are needed to keep global markets from spinning out of control.

Speculators operating in today's computerised capital markets daily move more than a trillion dollars across national borders raiding weak currencies and stampeding herds of nervous investors, trying to avoid these currency risks.

Just as countries formed alliances in the past to deal with military threats, nations faced with attacks on their currency and bond markets must now form new alliances to combat "economic aggression."

Global restructuring is accelerating, driven by financial flows — more than 90 per cent of which is speculative. Complex derivatives and "risk-management" instruments, designed to protect individual players, only add instability to the whole system.

Market players have become virtual legislators checking the ability of governments to tax, spend, borrow, or depreciate their debts through inflation. They undermine not only national macroeconomic management, but also social policy options in health, education, safety nets, employment, the environment and even the values and culture of citizens.

Politicians complain about their loss of domestic policy

Professional and trade bodies

Sir, One comment in the first editorial (about REHAB) and a letter on a doctor's heartlessness in the same page of the Star on 4th April points to a malady which can be pieced together. Doctors are blamed if a patient dies without attention. Engineer is blamed if a building/job fails. Professional bodies do not act. Possibly the charters of these institutions have no such provisions. But the charters are subject to amendment and the condition of the country is such that these are vital issues.

The economy is another major problem. Over-enthusiastic bureaucrats only too eager to please projected revenue assessment and tax collection figures far beyond their capabilities to accomplish.

While Ms Benazir has US \$ 20 billion in MOUs in hand in foreign investments, mostly in power projects it is most unlikely that more than 20% will come to any fruition.

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Enslaved by the ideas of their defunct economic advisors, they follow obsolete nation-based models of 'free markets' guided by finance ministers, the Bretton Woods institutions, central bankers, and even ministers with social portfolios.

Their conceptual blindness to the trillion dollar daily capital flow has meant the end of national sovereignty.

National legislation is ineffective and decisions, like that of Mexico, to set up its own futures markets to protect individual players will make things worse.

Only global agreements on currency exchange stabilisation, capital investment, as well as a restructuring of the Bretton Woods institutions can combat this global economic warfare.

A growing coalition of bankers, traders, investors, as well as regulators, politicians and even finance ministers acknowledge (at least in private) the need for new rules to create more orderly financial markets. Even inside players concede the new global markets are unstable, even cruel, and in need of regulation.

The recent US debate over the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and whether sovereignty would be lost was a nostalgic denial of reality.

But a new 'invisible foot' emerges as each 'national' actor's self-interested behaviour can endanger the whole system — unless rapid, collective action is taken.

Back Home, All is Not Well

While Ms Bhutto visits the US, and impressing her hosts with her considerable charisma and eloquence, her political house appears to be crumbling.

AS I SEE IT

Ikrum Sehgal writes from Karachi

on her tough rhetoric.

Drugs money has permeated every walk of life and is threatening to take over the infrastructure of society, a backlash financed by members of the drug cartel would be catastrophic unless she is prepared to take commensurate action against perceived foe and friend alike who have infiltrated both the major political groupings on the strength of their financial power.

Terrorism is closely linked to the extremists in various religious sects, there is always the danger that her stance may be taken as representative of the western, campaign against Islam itself, disguised as a front against fundamentalism.

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law enforcement agencies have been badly politicised, that is given a continuation of the policies in vogue earlier to Ms Benazir's reign. However, subservience by the bureaucrats to their political masters has come at heavy cost to the rule of law and has been virtually institutionalised.

The common perception is that the judiciary has been packed with loyal sympathizers and as such public trust in justice has fallen to an all-time low. Some of the manifestation has been seen in far out judgments hardly meant to inspire confidence in the judiciary's integrity.

For society this is a damning event because the populace believes that since justice will be denied in the normal process, they will increasingly turn to taking law into their own hands with disastrous consequences all around.

There is a rot of corruption eating at the heart of Ms Benazir's government, a time-bomb ticking away. As much as the PM rails against nepotism and corruption, the fact of the matter is that it is established at Ground Zero in her own administration. With all his strengths and weaknesses, late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was never considered corrupt. It is now so rampant in the Ms Benazir administration that even first brother, Mir Murtaza, has been regularly lambasting her government about widespread corruption.

While the Ms Bhutto administration does not have a corner on the market in corruption, successive governments before her having had their fair share of rascals, the public perception is force-multiplied by the other ills pervading the entire social and economic environment, particularly the bad law and order situation. Given the special circumstances, one does not see

how Ms Benazir can have the will to confront the corruption issue head on. That is the real tragedy, to have a person of her immense potential hamstringing in this manner.

All this while the Army sits on the sidelines, waiting and watching. Having ruled over the country for more than half its existence but stung by the criticism it has received over the years for its role during successive Martial Laws, the Army's presence seems to be strictly bound by (and adhering to) constitutional parameters. Acutely aware that the western world is sensitive to encouraging democracy (at least wherever and whenever it does not come into conflict with their own vital interests), the military hierarchy remains above the political fray though not averse to giving some public indication of their shifting

Bureaucratic Mystique in South Asia

A K M Jalaluddin

ACR—V

Enigma Wrapped in Mystery

It was a beautiful spring morning in Islamabad in 1967. The new capital of Pakistan, designed by Louis Kahn, looked like a picture taken out of children's book of fairy tales.

Agha Abdul Hamid, (ICS/31) the Cabinet Secretary of the Pakistan government, sounded truly concerned. An art critic, suave, urbane — and impeccably able and honest — Agha Hamid said, addressing the CSP and PFS probationers to 1966 batch, that he found the task of evaluating officers on the basis of their ACRs simply baffling.

Look at their dossier. For three years they get A-1 i.e. (excellent) ratings. Suddenly they start receiving poor, at times appallingly poor ratings. The reason is not their performance is poor but the 'other party' has come to power. And again very good reports, succeeded by perhaps poor ratings.

The reason was acute faction-mongering among some of the specialists since they operated within a narrow frame, the likes and dislikes were indeed very strong among them. Hence the extreme variations in their assessment, Hamid concluded.

A conscientious public ser-

perceptions from time to time. This is the year for jockeying for the all-important post of COAS. Whereas by all the measure of fairplay it should go to the one professionally most competent and not willing to sell one's soul at the altar of one's career, PPP's selection criteria has other facets of personality for evaluation.

However if the measure is that the present military hierarchy can stomach the present excesses by politicians on the various freedoms enjoined in a democracy, than we are in for more troubled times if the government selects for the next COAS a person tailored to their needs, which is essentially to look the other way.

Time is always the key to political survival, any substantive goodies that Ms Benazir can bring back from the US of A will contribute to the PPP's political longevity in the realm of governance.

The author, an industrialist, is a regular columnist for Pakistan newspapers.

Hamid was a just person par excellence. He was truly respected for his independence of views and integrity of character.

Hamid had also to pay a price for his independence of views. He was appointed Cabinet Secretary by the Suhrawardy government in 1957. After the coup of 1958, the government of Ayub Khan, the self-appointed President of Pakistan, forced him to go to Peshawar as a Divisional Commissioner (after spending some years in the purgatory, as an OSD to government, to atone for his guilt). Even then he was almost always on the sidelines; Director of the Civil Service Academy and Chairman of the Central Public Service Commission.

It was only in early 67 that the self-promoted Field Marshal relented and Hamid was appointed to the prestigious position of Cabinet Secretary. In that capacity, Hamid headed the superior selection board which was the clearing-house for all high-level promotions across the country. He, naturally enough, always had a tabular of confidential reports to study and digest.

Hamid did not exactly use the Churchillian diction of an 'enigma wrapped in mystery' but the essence, he told us, of his plight was this: the ACRs as maintained in Pakistan were indeed a jigsaw puzzle or a hydra-headed monster.

Nothing short of a thorough overhaul — a surgical operation — would correct the situation, Agha Hamid concluded

OPINION

A Tourist's Reaction

Allusnain

BPC, the national tourism agency in Bangladesh has utterly failed to provide the inspiring lead to the rapid development of tourism in the country since the new regime took over four years ago.

It is clear that the plans and ideas tried so far have failed to click. Hence a drastic new approach is needed. This critic is not the expert to point out the possible solutions. One obvious method is to appoint a reputed team of international consultants, with UNDP assistance initially for the survey report on management and business strategy. Thereafter, the BPC may tie up with an international agency to implement a fresh 5-Year Plan, including a crash programme during the first two years. Such an exercise will eat up a lot of dollars, but this investment could be recovered in the long run.

So far the readers are not clear about large scale foreign investment in the tourism sector. Even the local entrepreneurs, are not coming forward in a big way to boost the tourist industry in the private sector.

The Daily Star has been publishing a page on tourism every week. It makes dismal reading. The beautiful and interesting spots are there, but these are either inaccessible or the tourist amenities and comforts are lacking. The infrastructure is simply not there (in India, for example, it is far better).

It appears that the motivation of the various types of tourists have not been studied by experienced planners, and the executives planning tourism in the country have not got extensive personal travelling experience (as tourists) in foreign countries. Secondly, the local tourists are

being completely ignored — as if they do not exist! One small example: there are no daily tour buses to the Savar Monument and to Sonargaon village. A family cannot travel in our famous local bus service — and that too in a holiday mood! Travelling is a torture here — travel only when you must! How tourism can thrive under such an uninviting environment?

We are talking about infrastructure, link services, and basic logistics (the BPC duty free shops are closing down — 300% duty, as reported in the press). No taxi service in the whole country — not even in the metropolis Dhaka (metered, of course). My family, for example, could become more mobile and look around Dhaka if metered taxis were available.

A snag at almost every step. No public ladies' wash room anywhere in Bangladesh (no VAT on that please!). The standard of the private transport services is certainly neither enviable nor acceptable. All foreign tourists cannot hire limousines from vested groups (who are not allowing the opening of a metered taxi service in the city). Something in the corridors of power.

Tourism will not flourish with one eye on the dollar, and none on servicing the foreign tourists. The local brown tourists are not poor to travel and enjoy a middle-class holiday if incentive packages are forthcoming, and there are no hassles at every step.

Since the upright view is not producing the desired results, it is time to take an upside-down view of the whole existing operation on how to develop the tourist industry in a crisis country called Bangladesh. Perhaps the learned Opposition leaders have some bright ideas, since the ruling party has dried up on the subject!

Jute-pulp R&D

Sir, Reference BCIC IPR release (Star, April 5), I have a few queries:

- 1. AMF article may be released on the R&D being carried out on turning jute into paper or textile.
2. The following phases will take how many years: a) packing/brown paper; b) low grade writing paper and/or newsprint; c) superior writing/printing paper; d) crude textiles for furnishing; e) low

grade fabric for clothing; f) high grade textiles.

3. How many patents have been applied for, and the number granted.

4. Whether foreign consultants have been engaged at R&D level.

5. Any plan on transfer of technology to foreign users/countries.

6. The cost-benefit ratio to the jute farmers.

A Husnain Dhaka.