

## Election Watch

A non-governmental initiative has been launched to undertake independent tabulation of election results as and when it is held in the near future. The idea is to station trained people in all of the 300 parliamentary seats for which election will be held. According to the Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA), yet to be launched formally, about 45,000 people will be enlisted throughout the country to be placed in every polling station to work under a union coordinator, who will be under a thana coordinator, who in turn will be under a constituency coordinator to look after one particular parliamentary seat.

We welcome this initiative and commend those responsible for bringing it to fruition. The point that we would like to stress is training of the people who will be involved in it. Independent Vote Tabulation (IVT) will be as much a political and moral task, as it will be technical. It is the technical aspect that we lay stress on. Train the people who will be involved. As the organisers admit there are not too many examples of IVT in the world. It all began in Manila when private citizens took initiative to defeat the machination of Marcos to doctor the election results. For us such an experiment will be first ever. And it will have tremendous impact on the process of election — not only in the next one, but perhaps for the foreseeable future — if we can establish an authentic IVT mechanism. In addition to technical proficiency, FEMA will have to be very careful in ensuring that the people it will hire and train to the work, are truly non-partisan. If for once the whole process is vitiated by partisan tilt, or for some reason gets the image of being biased, the whole process will suffer. The main purpose of such a non-governmental exercise is to put pressure on the official mechanism to stick to the truth, and not to try to manipulate the real verdict. Such an exercise succeeds only if public trust on it remains extremely high, so that neither the ruling party nor the opposition finds reasons or excuses to question it. And as long as it remains beyond question, it remains effective.

FEMA should take time to get its house in order, and we wish them all the luck. With strict non-partisanship and a good deal of training the IVT can become an epoch-making exercise which will not only improve our election process but also reduce, to a great extent, the government's power to manipulate it.

A final point. Can't we fund it ourselves? Do we have to look for donor assistance in everything? Tk 2.5 crore is not that big a figure for the task of ensuring a free and fair election. Let's try to raise it by ourselves. To start with, this newspaper offers free advertisement space for any campaign that may be launched to raise funds for this exercise.

## Taming the Serbs

Modern time's one of the most barbaric and tragic chapters is now being staged in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The hatred and hostility in what was once Yugoslavia and from where the Balkan war spread in the shape of a global catastrophe are sending alarm bells all around once again. What is most worrying is the fact that the United Nations engaged in bringing peace there has been made a party to the fray, thanks to the Serb defiance to international laws and Geneva Convention. In the latest development, at least 18 UN peacekeepers have been held hostage and used as human shield against NATO air strikes. Further NATO air attacks will be retaliated by executing the UN peacekeepers, the Serbs have warned.

There is no crime the Serbs have not committed, they have signed agreements only to violate. So all international mediations have so far proved futile. They have held in contempt the entire international community and yet none thought it necessary to teach the war-mongers that the Serbs are, a lesson. This time French soldiers have been captured by the Serbs and going by their records they can be true to their words. Meaning they can kill the peacekeeping French troops. It is not for nothing that Jacques Chirac, the French President, has asked for a meeting of the UN Security Council to discuss the situation. He has warned of the possibility of withdrawal of French troops, largest of all UN contingents, from Bosnia.

What exactly is the source of Serbian strength that they can defy UN mandates and most of the great powers? It is scarcely a secret that Russia has been an ally to the Serbs. Until now the Russian position has not been strongly challenged by the dividing house of Western alliance. Now is the time pressures of all kinds have to be created on Russia either to get out of the conflict or to sincerely issue to the Serbs an ultimatum to return to the negotiating table for a durable solution. A protracted war there has the potential to lead to a third world war.

## Quality of Meat in City

A weekly column "Down to Earth" published last Saturday, has drawn our attention to a very important aspect of our city life. Who controls the quality of meat that is sold in the city markets? With the rapid rise of Dhaka's population the meat market is expanding very fast, and with it the question of quality of the meat sold in the markets is also becoming extremely important. Of course, there are many good laws in existence. One of which says that butchers are permitted to slaughter animals only at authorised places, and take meat to the market after quality inspection seal has been put on the meat by municipal officials. That, as we said, is the law. The reality is far different. The uncontrolled growth of meat shops pose two types of dangers for the citizens. First is the quality aspect. The other is that of disposal of animal parts left over after slaughter. These issues need to be addressed urgently.

To start with, we feel that the number of five authorised slaughter houses should immediately be raised to ten, and each of these places should have more inspectors than the present five. We must also introduce visiting supervisors who will go on spot checks to monitor the work of inspectors. For every diseased animal found to have been slaughtered, the inspectors should be given stringent jail terms, so that it acts as severe deterrent for others. Number of veterinary surgeons must also be increased.

Whatever we do, it is clear that the existing facilities are highly inadequate to handle the rapidly rising meat requirement of Dhaka city. The increased meat supply will have to be adequate and also safe. And all this will have to be done in a healthy and environmentally sound manner. This is the minimum requirement of any modern city.

We often talk of hangovers from colonial bureaucracy in a general way, particularly when we feel frustrated in our dealings with officials. But what we really need to do is to firstly, identify these hangovers; secondly, analyse why these still persist; and finally, suggest a way out, so that at least by the time we enter the twenty-first century, we can start with a clean slate.

A systematic discussion on colonial hangovers may be organised in two parts, namely, those pertaining to the hierarchy within the bureaucracy, and those in relation to dealings with the common man. Some of the more explicit examples of colonial hangovers within the bureaucratic hierarchy that one often encounters in Bangladesh are constant "sirring" of the boss: standing up from the seat when the boss enters the room; receiving and seeing off bosses at airports, railway stations and launch terminals; offering elaborate farewells and receptions to bosses through speech making, presents, refreshments and garlanding; and lavish entertainment of the boss during official field visits.

These "courtesies" are generally also extended to the wife and children of the boss. In fact, sometimes, members of the boss's family expect these as a matter of right. To these examples may also be added the practice of lavishly entertaining important visitors in the office with food and drinks. This is perhaps more feudal than colonial but they are no doubt enmeshed with one another.

The "sirring" phenomenon often takes on an extreme form, so that the word "sir" may be repeated several times in a single sentence. An outsider experiencing "sirring" for the first time may find it rather amusing, but for one hearing it constantly, it may be extremely annoying, particularly if its impact amounts to loss of meaning of the sentence. At its worst, it may also be degrading because it aggravates the disparity in an already unequal relationship, and this does not generally permit a rational argument from a subordinate to prevail.

The argument that this three-letter word shows respect to a senior is utter nonsense because in an office situation, we should be interested more with output and results than outmoded niceties of etiquette. It may be a good physical exercise, but standing and sitting in rhythm with the entry and exit of the boss is a terribly demanding act. Consider the plight of the poor bearer

It may be a good physical exercise, but standing and sitting in rhythm with the entry and exit of the boss is a terribly demanding act. Consider the plight of the poor bearer

STATISTICAL indicators clearly show the deep malaise in the economy with inflation, deficit spending, corruption, etc. eating into a bunch of rates, the vitals of our economy. With revenue collection falling way short of projected targets and non-development expenditure on the rise despite Government of Pakistan's (GOP) best efforts, GOP's budget makers have to accomplish a Houdini act to get out of this financial Gordian knot. About the only positive indicator for GOP at this time is the blizzard of MOUs that signal the PPP regime's all-out resolve to get foreign investment into the country at any cost, even by "mortgaging the country's economic assets", according to a recent statement of the Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FCCI). The MOUs notwithstanding, all other indicators point to a gradual slide to impending economic doom.

Our revenue collection does not even equal the financial outlays required for "Debt servicing" and "Defence Spending". We are mired in debt even before we can make any further financial allocation for administrative and/or development programmes. Our first priority should be to reduce both external and internal debt to lessen the recurring burden while searching ways and means to make sure that every penny paid for Defence estimates is fully accountable.

IMF has been pressurising GOP to reduce tariffs. A working paper prepared by the IMF for an April 22, 1993 meeting had tacitly agreed to a gradual tariff reduction in order that domestic industry (sometimes enjoying inordinate protection) would not collapse. However Mian Nawaz Sharif's elected government was brought down a few days before the agreement was formalised and Mr Benazir's elected Govt. was forced into a fait accompli by the slavish acceptance of all conditions by former interim PM (and ex-World Bank employee) Moin Qureshi, who proved more "loyal than the King" in sending Pakistan industry pell mell on the road to disaster.

The protection given to our local industry is gone as we rapidly become a Dubai-like haven for foreign consumer products which at almost at par in price but are better in quality than the locally manufactured ones. Factories from Khyber to Karachi are closing down as manufacturers cannot sustain recurring losses to match such competition. If it

# Hangovers from Colonial Bureaucracy

**"Courtesies" are generally also extended to the wife and children of the boss. In fact, sometimes, members of the boss's family expect these as a matter of right.**

sitting on a stool outside the Sahib's room, standing up after every minute, because for him almost anyone entering the Sahib's room is his superior, and hence, he is obligated to stand up at that frequency. It is quite possible for junior officers and subordinate staff to keep standing upto an hour in the boss's room simply because the boss did not ask them to sit down. Sometimes, even if requested by a "cranky" boss, the subordinate will generally hesitate to sit down, because it is simply not the etiquette that has been ingrained into his system. There are also instances when a subordinate will even touch the feet of the boss "out of respect".

A phenomenon related to such "boss supremacy" in Bangladesh is his propensity to call subordinates to his room: uncounted number of times in a day, and mostly on the flimsiest of grounds. Although such a practice is extremely annoying and time wasting, the boss would invariably find it beneath his dignity to walk down to his subordinate's office and discuss an official matter with him there. He will sometimes find it inconvenient even to talk to his subordinate over the intercom or telephone. On the other hand, the same person working in an international organisation would perhaps gladly carry official files and papers to his subordinate, because there, no one, not even the janitor, would put up with his lordly behaviour.

For high officials, there may be a justification for one or two of their personal staff to be attending on them during their arrivals and departures, but when a retinue of subordinates, sometimes along with their wives, turn up to attend on the boss whenever he is going out or returning, there is certainly something utterly wrong somewhere. During the late eighties, officers of a particular Ministry were notorious for such "valet service". Ceremonial farewells on the transfer, retirement, resignation, etc. of officials are quite common in every country. But it is the absurd degree of their elaborateness and the time and money wasted on these in Bangladesh that make them sickening to any sensible human being. A most hypocritical aspect of such official farewells is the eulogy that is bestowed

It may be a good physical exercise, but standing and sitting in rhythm with the entry and exit of the boss is a terribly demanding act. Consider the plight of the poor bearer

It may be a good physical exercise, but standing and sitting in rhythm with the entry and exit of the boss is a terribly demanding act. Consider the plight of the poor bearer

on the boss, and repeated in speech after speech in many different forms, although everyone jolly well knows the hollowness of the entire exercise.

Entertaining the boss during official field visits is another disgusting practice in our country that has only been strengthened over time. However modest the boss gets a daily allowance (DA), but he has to be provided with every meal, sometimes cooked not in the Dak Bungalow or Circuit House but supplied from the subordinate official's residence. There is no doubt that the present DA rate is absurdly low and should be raised immediately, but this can be no excuse for sponging on subordinates while on an official tour. Indeed, this practice directly puts pressure on subordinates at the field level to seek corrupt ways and means.

sobering effect on this practice.

Though not clear to many the implications of this practice are highly negative, to say the least.

Firstly, it is a despicably sight, which gives the impression that our bureaucrats are an easy going, feudal, non-professional lot bogged down in eating and drinking rather than getting on with their work.

Secondly, it causes considerable waste of precious office time. A number of peons and bearers are constantly engaged in preparing, arranging and serving food and drinks, and hence are unavailable for substantive work. Given their extremely poor and slothful training, they will invariably also cause a lot of fuss, distraction and delay in serving the food and drinks. In the process, valuable time is wasted, annoyance is caused and attention is diverted. Thirdly, these

more importantly, vise subservience. Indeed these very traits are also reflected in the relationship between officials and the common man.

Firstly, across the board, there is a tendency among officials (sometimes the prettier you are, the more staunch you become) to stringently uphold laws, rules, regulations, executive orders, time honoured practices, etc. even when these are completely out of date, utterly stupid and harmful in practice, and the officials have the discretion to overlook and bend these, it is because, not human welfare but maintenance of the status quo is what matters in a system characterised by extreme domination.

Secondly, as expected, the same subservient official will turn into a tiger when dealing with the common man. Suspicion, disbelief, misbehaviour and throwing about rules are the common weapons he would generally employ in treating the lungi-clad person daring to come up to him. Even the bench or the tool may not be offered to him, let alone any refreshment. He is only expected to keep standing and wait with folded hands.

Why have these colonial hangovers persisted? Administration is basically the handmaiden of politics, and since after 1947 politics based on the will of the common man could not be more than a punctuation mark in a whole paragraph of authoritarian rule in our country, there was hardly any scope to reform the inherited administrative culture and practice in any far-reaching manner. In fact, in certain respects, further versions may have crept in. Authoritarian rule based on collusion between military and civil bureaucrats prevailed because of the "over-developed" colonial state in relation to political institutions and the civil society.

Colonial hangovers were also reinforced by the remnants of our feudal way of life.

We had, of course, one golden opportunity following our Liberation Struggle, in 1971, to change all that.

But at that time, I suppose, we were interested more in "capturing" than "reforming" the bureaucracy.

We have so far failed to do so.

These and such other practices stem from, among others, two colonial/federal traits, namely, supremacy of "form" over "substance", and

## Making Government Work

by Analyst

because every now and then there are so many bosses with expensive food habits to look after. Nowadays, in certain sectors of the government, entertainment of the bosses has been institutionalised through the so-called "LR Fund" which is collected from gun licensees, businessmen and others on a regular basis.

In any case, important guests and visitors are hardly the people who need extra food. Also, the food and drinks served in the offices are generally sugary, greasy, adulterated stuff causing more harm than good. There is, of course, the argument of traditional Bengali hospitality, which is rubbish. If we wish to demonstrate our hospitality, we might as well show it outside the office. Foreigners are amused by our practice when experiencing it for the first time, but later on they find it disgusting, a matter to be ridiculed rather than appreciated. In fact, I have heard foreigners say, "Wasting food is part of the culture in countries where food is in greatest shortage". I am not arguing that serving food and drinks in the offices should be abolished outright. I am only asking for showing the restraint, which we have so far failed to do.

These and such other practices stem from, among others, two colonial/federal traits, namely, supremacy of "form" over "substance", and

## PAKISTAN: Pre-Budget Economic Review-II

# Benazir's Choice

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

The Second part of a three-part series on Pakistan's economy

were confined to soap, toothpaste, perfume, chocolates, ice cream (yes, even ice cream), etc. we would be apprehensive, given the fact that the continued manufacture of a wide range of products including textiles, garments, towels, shoes, leather goods, bicycles, electric fans, etc. is also being badly affected is good cause for absolute alarm.

In a final irony (or nail in the economic coffin) there is even a likelihood of dumping of textiles by developed countries in Pakistan. Widespread unemployment is already a major problem for the urban millions. It is going to get much worse. Instead of conserving our precious foreign exchange for machinery, etc. it is being squandered on cosmetics, jewellery, chocolates, etc. On

60s when "Gherao and Jalao" (are our memories that short?) reduced the economy to shambles before we stumbled into the 1971 crisis.

Sufficient effort has not been made to recover outstanding loans.

In the textile industry alone, Rs 29 billion is the figure of stuck-up loans. Prominent public figures of all shades of political leaning who form the country's so-called elite are the major defaulters. GOP has shown enthusiasm in going only after its political "enemies", thereby undercutting the credibility of the process. In fact recovery has been as low as 1-2%. To the credit of Ms Benazir Govt., they have overcome objections to the publishing of names of loan defaulters, this should have good effect. Equal incentives are not

point. On the other hand, even if 15-20% of the MOUs come to fruition it would constitute substantial progress in overcoming the present energy deficiency but even then we will be short of the quantum required for accelerated economic growth.

Since foreign investment in the other areas of the manufacturing sector of the economy is virtually nil, without increased production where will we get the money to pay our IOUs for our MOUs? The present Catch-22 cycle puts us deeper in debt without adding to the means for meeting our obligations for the most part.

The blizzard of MOUs signed by the present regime with foreign companies, primarily in the energy sector, have become the subject of macabre humour, nothing more expressive than MAXIM's

point. On the other hand, even if 15-20% of the MOUs come to fruition it would constitute substantial progress in overcoming the present energy deficiency but even then we will be short of the quantum required for accelerated economic growth.

Messrs Shahid Hassan Khan, Special Assistant to the PM and Salman Faruki, Secretary, Ministry of Water, Power and (now) the Environment,

have played yeomen's role in a calculated policy of creating publicity-oriented statistics which were eminently believable but a year down the road this may be unravelling in a paper trail of promises unfilled by potential investors while serious investors have been led merrily down a garden path. Not one big player in world energy has signed an MOU in Pakistan. The much-touted transparency is missing from the process, the process is increasingly mired in nepotism and manipulation except for a few show-piece cases.

Unfortunately brilliance is sometimes a cover for intellectual dishonesty, a sorry commentary on the credibility of the whole process. This is a recurring (and not uncommon) phenomenon among those technocrats who willingly compromise their conscience in order to profit materially at the cost of country. An outstanding advocate for foreign investment in the energy sector, the PM follows an unbearable confrontational policy with respect to the manufacturing sector. Along with international economic complications GOP's policies have resulted in Pakistan's primary

caroon about a beggar asking a passerby to "at least give an MOU" if not some money. There is method to the Federal Govt.'s seeming madness, not the least being its publicity potential. The general cynicism among the knowledgeable notwithstanding, the real target is the mass perception and the proven gullibility of the general public when their aspirations are titillated by expansive rhetoric.

None of the US \$ 80 billion in MOUs promised to the Soviet Union during the Gorbachev era ever saw the light of day. The Soviet masses were given a glimpse of Heaven as their country was led to systematic destruction even as Gorbachev's ego was being stroked by the western media as an "outstanding" leader of his time. The Soviet Union paid the price for Mr Gorbachev's self-propagation which lasted till the nation he led became economically bankrupt and thereafter the Union self-destructed. Thereafter Gorbachev having served his purpose became history.

The popular (and unfilled) "Rou, Kapra and Makhan" slogan of the 70s given by the PM's late father is another case in

have played yeomen's role in a calculated policy of creating publicity-oriented statistics which were eminently believable but a year down the road this may be unravelling in a paper trail of promises unfilled by potential investors while serious investors have been led merrily down a garden path. Not one big player in world energy has signed an MOU in Pakistan. The much-touted transparency is missing from the process, the process is increasingly mired in nepotism and manipulation except for a few show-piece cases.

Unfortunately brilliance is sometimes a cover for intellectual dishonesty, a sorry commentary on the credibility of the whole process. This is a recurring (and not uncommon) phenomenon among those technocrats who willingly compromise their conscience in order to profit materially at the cost of country. An outstanding advocate for foreign investment in the energy sector, the PM follows an unbearable confrontational policy with respect to the manufacturing sector. Along with international economic complications GOP's policies have resulted in Pakistan's primary

bureaucracy. On the contrary, a great deal is possible now, mainly because both the national and the international climate is in favour of democracy rather than autocracy, and the issue of governance is now centre stage everywhere. Secondly, given the successive batters over time, the bureaucracy in Bangladesh is in no position to resist change in either direction. Hence, well-thought-out measures to do away with colonial hangovers are bound to succeed.

Obviously the first requirement in this regard is the "political will" of whichever democratic government is in power in Bangladesh. But often, "political will