

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 "sitting" 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 "sitting" phenomenon often takes on an extreme form, so that the word "sir" may be repeated several times in a single sentence. An outsider experiencing "sitting" 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

Hangovers from Colonial Bureaucracy

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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 up to 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 umpteen 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

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 despicable 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, vile 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 pettier 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 stool 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 perversions 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 1972, to change all that. But at that time, I suppose, we were interested more in "capturing" than "reforming" the bureaucracy.

I do not think the situation is so gloomy that nothing can be done to overcome the hangovers of colonial/feudal

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 batterings 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" degenerates into wishy washy actions, and hence everything goes into reverse gear, generating a tremendous amount of frustration as an aftermath. The "political will" has to be translated into sustained actions, such as a well-thought-out "do's and don'ts" circular on these and other related issues of administrative norms from the government, a series of officials' meetings at all levels to explain their full implications, compulsory inclusion of the materials of the circular in all government training programmes, wide media publicity on a regular basis, etc.

Political will has also to be demonstrated through personal examples at the highest levels of government. However, in preparing the circular, care will have to be taken to consult officials and other relevant people at all levels, so that it is realistic and does not appear to be over-ambitious. Also, sensible alternatives will have to be offered, wherever required. For example, if juniors are no more required to address their seniors as "sir", then one must also devise a new form of address, which is modern, reflects the egalitarian character of our society, and is at the same time culturally sensitive.

In the beginning, no substantive punishment should be meted out to violators of the circular. However, the worst of them should be warned, first privately and then publicly. On the other hand, some positive incentives in the form of an award or a public mention could be provided to those who strictly abide by the circular. Finally, periodic evaluation should be carried out by independent public administration experts to test the circular's effectiveness at the implementation level and identify the changes required for the future.

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

tates such as railways, roads, dams, etc are not able to pay for themselves because of revenue shortages due to leakages. Without drawing the private sector into the country's socio-economic development, we cannot hope for economic emancipation. On the other hand, what we are achieving by ruining them financially? GOP is increasingly going to rely on General Sales Tax (GST) to make up for its revenues, a Herculean effort steeped in frustration in a society that shuns documentation 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.

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 towards debt servicing.

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

The government, with firm control over the financial sector, has adopted a policy that is heavily tilted towards a partnership between the agrarian sector and foreign investment with "loyal" industrialists making up the third pole of the 'triad'.

the other hand the developed countries, particularly US, Japan and the European Community have set strong trade barriers against such products and produce that affect their domestic industry as a measure of blatant protectionism. What success has Pakistan had in selling rice to Japan or having textile quotas increased to the US? To protect their industries US has opted for trade sanctions against Japan for resisting free import of automobiles and spares. And here we are opening up our markets at disastrous cost to industry and the economy. Why and to please (or benefit) whom?

Instead of encouraging domestic investment by local entrepreneurs by giving them a market-oriented Labour Policy providing employers with inherent right to "hire and fire", it is believed that the proposed Labour policy (which was not announced as scheduled on May Day) in its unadulterated form takes away that basic right giving dominance to Labour's right over that of the Employers — an open invitation to a return to the economic environment of the late

being given to industry as for agriculture. Without such incentives there will be no attraction for industry for potential investors, domestic or foreign (except of course the energy and telecommunications gold mine).

We keep on talking about taxing agriculture income while conveniently overlooking the fact that all income must be taxable on an equitable basis. Why should the urban population made to bear this burden alone and agriculturists enjoy subsidies and grants paid for by the taxes that urbanites pay? Solutions cannot be hoped for when 90% of those who sit in the legislative Assemblies are agriculturists who do not pay taxes but sit on judgement as to who will pay taxes (and in what quantum)?

Another sore point is the low measure of property tax recovery and GOP's unwillingness to take winding-up action against sick mills. In the face of an expected bumper wheat crop, GOP is gearing up to importing wheat, a tacit acceptance that smuggling of foodgrains to neighbouring countries cannot be controlled.

Our infra-structure facili-

ties such as railways, roads, dams, etc are not able to pay for themselves because of revenue shortages due to leakages. Without drawing the private sector into the country's socio-economic development, we cannot hope for economic emancipation. On the other hand, what we are achieving by ruining them financially? GOP is increasingly going to rely on General Sales Tax (GST) to make up for its revenues, a Herculean effort steeped in frustration in a society that shuns documentation 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 cartoon 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 utilised 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 unfulfilled) "Roi, Kapra and Makan" 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 unfulfilled by potential investors while serious investors have been led merely 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.

value-added sector, the garment manufacturing industry to be mired in deep crisis with about 900 out of 1500 units closed. The textile industry is also in a similar crisis with a larger number of units terminally sick while the consumer manufacturing industry faces catastrophe as tariffs are reduced throughout the whole spectrum of imports.

The government, with firm control over the financial sector, has adopted a policy that is heavily tilted towards a partnership between the agrarian sector and foreign investment with "loyal" industrialists making up the third pole of the "triad". Skeptics say that this is a deliberate policy that is based on PPP's realisation that the urban vote is forever lost to the PPP and that further PPP rule can only be perpetuated by a deliberate policy of promoting agriculture at the cost of industry. In this manner the urban population will be "punished" for its "disloyalty" in supporting the Opposition.

On the face of available evidence about the systematic destruction of the domestic industry even while foreign entrepreneurs are being welcomed in a dual-faced policy, one cannot believe anything else. Analysts seriously believe that the PM is refraining from politically tackling the worsening law and order situation in Karachi as an extension of a deliberate "scorched earth" policy. The law enforcement agencies (LEAs) have brought temporary peace of sorts to Karachi in the past few weeks but credit must also be given to the MQM (A) in acting maturely by holding back its militant cohorts in check. The importance of the LEAs in Hyderabad has shown up the fact that political problems can only have political solutions, all other measures are but temporary and can only provide "aspirin" relief where deliberate surgery is necessary.

With limited options in the present economic circumstances all indications are that the PM has opted for what she perceives to be the lesser of two evils to her politically, choosing agriculture over industry. In the movie "Sophie's Choice", when the German Nazis in Poland gave Sophie a choice between which of her two siblings would survive, Sophie was faced with a classic Hobson's predicament. Not so for the PM she is willingly to sacrifice domestic industry quite happily at the altar of agriculture (and the rural votes her PPP must rely upon to stay in power).

Tomorrow: Economic Fortress Pakistan