

Poison-free Foodstuffs

A report carried in one of Dhaka's English dailies has presented a frightening picture. It concerns the daily dishes of the seventy plus million citizens of this capital city. A research conducted jointly by the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) and the Department of Environment (DoE) has concluded that most of the vegetables grown in Dhaka's adjacent areas — that land in the city's market — contain high proportion of toxic and agro-chemical residues. Then dry fish coming from all over the country has an alarming concentration of DDT and its toxic metabolites. The presence of toxic residues of pesticides in foodstuffs, according to experts, causes cancer and other incurable diseases, mainly through affecting the central nervous system.

The use of DDT and heptachlor in vegetable crops and foodstuffs is banned in the country. But the farmers defy the ban to kill pests and to get higher production. It has been estimated that of the 50 tonnes of vegetables the city populace consumes every day, 30 tonnes are so contaminated. As for the dry fish, it seems the total daily intake of two and a half tonnes is entirely poisoned by DDT. The Institute of Food and Radiation Biology, Savar, under BAEC, which carried out the research, has found unacceptable concentration of toxic pesticides in spinach, cabbage, cauliflower, tomato, cucumber, lady's finger, potato, brinjal, plantain and dry fish. Evidently the popular — and some of them available round the year — items that constitute the average family's daily dishes become carriers of poison.

It is, therefore, a very important issue that has to be faced squarely. We are caught in the dilemma of ensuring adequate supply of the vegetables without contamination. Without agro-chemicals and pesticides the production is bound to fall, particularly after the soil has been degraded by the overuse of those substances. So what is the way out? One answer may be to ensure the non-application of the harmful agents like DDT. The farmers have to be persuaded to go for alternative pesticides — of course without health risks — and their discriminate use. Those less hazardous chemicals should also be made available to the farmers. Apart from this, choice for organic fertilizer has to be made gradually. The use of such fertilizer has produced encouraging results. The problem is its mass production. Keeping it as a long-term goal we should concentrate on research and experiment with organic fertiliser.

Consumer Resistance a Matter of Culture

Finance Minister Saifur Rahman is sad as there is nothing in the land to protect the consumer. And also because the consumers are so disorganised as not present their case to him, as had been done by numerous representatives of the different stations of life, on the eve of budget-making. "The consumers' voice is always unheard and the consumers are never given a fair treatment," he told a seminar in Dhaka on Tuesday.

Those are all truisms of a rather elementary level. Successive governments have been consistent in hurting the consumer in two ways. One, by yielding to pressures of producers and manufacturers and, most of all, traders. Local industry loses to foreign imports mainly because of the many and hefty taxes government exacts from trading. For every piece that the consumer buys over the counter, some money travels to government coffers.

Then, government is directly a producer and a manufacturer, a trader and a seller of services in the national market of buyables. From postal envelopes to railway tickets it has not only been unkind to have raised prices by spurts as high as 100 per cent but supremely foolish to the boot. When communication is the biggest and bursting business in the nation it has successfully gifted its crores of potential buyers of a rail ticket to other transport parties — by hiking fare and offering awful service.

It is governmental sledgehammering that bludgeons any prospect of consumer resistance popping its head. Remember the years government was charging the price of international oil crisis days although slump had set in long before. Who from among the consumers raised a single voice? None. It requires a culture to denounce and resist the unjust. When it comes to buying and selling, Bangladesh, thanks to the successive governments, as yet far from imbibing that culture.

A Threat to Newspapers

For all of their successes as an institution specially in the present century the newspapers perhaps have started to stagnate as a dynamic social force. The International Federation of Newspaper Publishers said on Tuesday, that newspaper circulation in much of the developed north had registering a steady loss over recent years. In 1994 it fell by 1.87 per cent in the EC nations and by 1.33 in the US. Japanese, the nation most addicted to newspaper reading, have also returned decrease of 0.13 per cent.

This is in spite of all these nations earning and spending more and advancing steadily in cultural and educational spheres. There is no mystery there. Newspapers are losing to television. In other words, intellection is losing to entertainment or linguistic satiation to the audio-visual one. And this is happening when television and other such media are far from taking over in any significant manner the many roles the newspapers play, social, political, cultural etc. etc.

Newspapers in our national setting are not ideal servers of the society. But the mainstream has been steadfast in their job of educating and informing people and selling them to think and form opinion. We shudder at the thought of people turning away from newspapers at this juncture of our social development. But perhaps satellite TV is threatening us exactly with that. It is a challenge that our newspapers must overcome in the interest of our society and civilisation as a whole.

Whither Civil Service Training in Bangladesh?

Our political masters may come up with the most wonderful decisions in the Parliament and in cabinet meetings, but there will be a pigmy bureaucracy around to ensure that at the end of the day, nothing is ever implemented.

THE importance of training civil servants for all cadres can hardly be overemphasised. In the context of Bangladesh, it assumes added significance for at least two reasons. Firstly, given the deteriorating quality of education in our universities, and the consequent lower educational level of civil service recruits, training has to help fill in some of the gaps in their education, besides imparting necessary motivation and skills in preparing them for their jobs. Secondly, in addition to poor recruitment over the years, training of officers has also been grossly neglected in our country since independence. Its impact is now being sharply felt, with a drastic decline in efficiency and capability at all levels of the bureaucracy.

Indeed, if this trend continues, we may soon end up with the most incompetent bureaucracy in South Asia, and we may have to hire consultants to write cabinet papers, which, I am told, happens in some African countries. Our political masters may come up with the most wonderful decisions in the Parliament and in cabinet meetings, but there will be a pigmy bureaucracy around to ensure that at the end of the day, nothing is ever implemented. Contrast the situation with our armed forces in this regard. While our armed forces were throughout much more serious about training officers and men in terms of deployment of resources and design of training content, the opposite took place in the civil sector. I

am not at all suggesting that training alone can, all on a sudden, bring about a sea-change in the quality of the bureaucracy. However, I am certainly making a strong case for revamping civil service training, which in conjunction with other reforms, can make a remarkable difference to the quality of our civil servants, in the long run. I will, therefore, straightaway try to outline some of the more pressing priorities in this area.

Firstly, training institutes must not be made dumping grounds for "undesirable" government servants. We may do whatever else we like with them such as making them OSDs, suspending and dismissing them, etc. but not send them to training institutes, particularly to be their heads. A government servant on punishment posting is like a poisonous weed which destroys all other plants in the garden. He takes out all his frustration on the very people he is supposed to motivate through training. He takes no interest in training, and the trainees get the message that training is nothing more than an official ritual that has to be somehow gone through. In the end, there is total demoralisation and atrophy in an organisation which is supposed to be bursting with life. In this regard, we should follow the example of our armed forces, and send the best officers to the training institutes, even if it causes some temporary diffi-

culties in running the Ministries and Departments. If the right kind of civil servants are not available or are unwilling to volunteer, the posts should be openly advertised, and persons with the best qualifications should be brought in from outside for a fixed tenure. The moot point here is that only committed and competent persons should be made trainers and heads of training institutes, not unwilling or undesirable or worthless civil servants.

Secondly, trainers must be

lasting impression on the young minds of the trainees. If it is inadequate, it will show up eventually, even if the quality of recruits is good. Thus, the existing three months of force in the name of initial training of civil servants should be extended to a year and institutionalised in the form of an MA/Post-Graduate Diploma to be awarded from a university. Even a joint degree in collaboration with a reputed foreign university may be contemplated. Besides, usual courses in development economics,

ers should be brought in from outside to impart TOT under Technical Assistance Programmes.

Fourthly, all training programmes, long, medium or short, must include functional English and use of computer and other modern office equipment, given that we have demonstrated clear weakness in these areas and indeed, without a grasp over these, we cannot face the modern world. Fifthly, we must reduce our dependence on guest lecturers, otherwise quality, continuity and consistency in training cannot be maintained. At present, the permanent faculty is acting more as training managers than as trainers.

Sixthly, foreign training facilities offered must be fully utilised and responsibilities must be fixed for non-utilisation, particularly in view of the decentralisation already carried out in this regard. Trainers and best trainees must get a preference in foreign training. In fact, the situation in regard to trained manpower in the bureaucracy is now so serious that about 500 to 1,000 young (after 5-7 years of service) civil servants from all cadres should be sent out to the UK (or other English speaking Western countries) during the next five years to do a Master's or a Post-Graduate Diploma in their respective fields. If necessary, the government should partially finance this scheme from its own resources and negotiate

soft term loans from the World Bank and ADB. If all facilities cannot be obtained under British Technical Assistance, Britain is preferable because of old ties, greater political acceptability and, most importantly, ease of adjustment with the British academic system even after a gap of several years as a civil servant.

Finally, during their training, mid-level and senior officers should be made to contribute to governmental work of a consultancy nature. Thus, besides receiving training, mid-level officers should be given the exercise of revising government executive orders, regulations and laws which the government wishes to change. Similarly, senior officers during training may be required to write new manuals or revise old ones and formulate policy guidelines in specific fields. In fact, all Ministries should indicate their consultancy requirements to relevant training institutes well in advance if such fruitful use of experienced officers is to be made.

We have a National Training Council but its large size perhaps does not allow it to be active. We give into "ad hocism" under the day to day pressure of work. There have also been other pressing administrative problems. All these explanations may be genuine, but they will not help stop the administrative collapse that is now round the corner. Therefore, policy-makers must give immediate attention to training of civil servants before things go beyond repair. The above recommendations are meant to assure them that it is not as yet too late to act.

Making Government Work

by Analyst

given adequate incentives, both monetary and otherwise, eg allowances, accelerated promotion, preference in selections for foreign training, a prize posting, etc. after successful completion of tenure as trainer. Similar incentives should also be given to the best trainees. These incentives are indeed a small price to pay compared to the rich dividends they yield in the long run.

Thirdly, for the present we should concentrate on two types of training, namely, (a) in-service training following recruitment; and (b) training of trainers. The first after entry in-service training has a

public administration and Bangladesh Studies. It should have a high dose of practical inputs such as field trips, village studies, case work, assignments, etc. The training methodology should move away from a heavy reliance on classroom lectures and include audio-visual aids and participatory practices. Every Training Institute should have a core group of permanent trainers who must be fully equipped to perform their jobs. This means, a high priority on training of trainers (TOT) both within and outside the country along with regular refresher courses. If there is an economy of scale, quality foreign train-

Pakistan's Defence Budget

More Bang for the Buck

interspersed with some actual transfer of technology from time to time.

Security Considerations

Because of reasons of security it would be inappropriate and counter-productive to make a detailed analysis of our defence requirements with respect to the operational role of formations in the pages of a newspaper so only a general discussion can be made, suffering as it will from the lack of substantial argument about technology and tactics. Furthermore, except for the possible exception of US Senator Sam Nunn, no single person can really boast of having a detailed computer-like knowledge of any country's defence requirements. Given the self-imposed restrictions coupled with modest qualifications, one can discuss and recommend solutions to get more 'Bang for the Buck' within these parameters. One can indulge in some suggestions for cost cutting without affecting the respective operational roles of the three Defence Services.

The Aim of the Defence Services

It is to defend the frontiers of the State and the territorial sovereignty of the Nation at all costs. All other functions are subordinate to the Aim, the selection and maintenance of which is the first Principle of War. In the fulfillment of the Aim, the primary requisite of the Armed Forces is to prepare for war. This preparation will be dictated by the enemy's strength and intentions, the terrain and our own resources. Once one has assessed the enemy's intention and capabilities we can earmark our own manpower and equipment requirements. Allocations of forces and material depends very much on optimum strategy devised by our planners. This dictates the Tables of Organisation and Equipment which must and should be different for each sector and service. For the Army, there are four main areas of operation, the high mountains, the

mountains, the plains and the desert. Pakistan Air Force, applying the interior lines for defence theory into practice much more assiduously, is well balanced with its induction of advanced equipment and their allocations to different sectors. The Pakistan Navy has barely some submarines and aviation forces given the Indian build-up, having been sorely neglected in development and its previously limited role can now be enhanced only at great cost — and it must be!

Re-organisation

We have a frequent perception of the structure of the Armed forces being exceedingly top-heavy. With the current expansion this perception is reinforced by a realistic

lot (mainly) in a combat aircraft (or a small crew). This is acceptable but for the Army and Navy certainly not. With the advent of more Corps Formations in the Army, the administrative functions as regards manpower management of the Divisional HQs should be drastically cut down and taken over by the Corps HQ while the support and supply functions should be handled by the Logistics Area. DW HQs should be reduced to the level of Tactical HQs which can assemble Task Forces at a short notice on an as required basis. Battalion, Brigade and Divisional HQs should basically be at Tactical HQ strength and located, as is being the case in actual war conditions, with the reserve subunit within the respective

up to the licence stage. This will also give considerable saving on POL besides avoiding wear and tear of the equipment. Re-organisation is also necessitated because of the induction of various high-tech weapons at the sub-unit, unit level, new tactics have as such to be also evolved considering the changing demands of modern warfare.

Batmen

Batmen are a sacred cows and must be done away with immediately. Married officers should be authorised an allowance equivalent to a salary of one individual cook for acquiring one civilian servant while the pattern of the Air force where the bachelor officers share the services of bearers should be adopted. With the saying on manpower, one can probably create a fresh infantry division.

National Logistic Cell (NLC) and Frontier Works Organisation

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

assessment of the number of commanders promoted into various positions. During time of peace top-heavy structure pose administrative problems only but during wartime they can prove to be operationally fatal. The defence services must be made lean and tough and the way to go about it is to drastically reduce (1) the number of HQs right down the line, (2) the number of staff in each HQ, (3) the ancillary troops attached to each HQ. This is necessary to make better use of our manpower and to have a better ratio between those expected to do the fighting and those in supporting roles.

It goes without saying that the fighting arms must have adequate logistic support but the present tendency, not only in Pakistan but all over the world, to have the main mass of men in logistical services and very few men forward in the field of battle must be immediately reversed. For the Air Force, which uses a single pi-

units.

Transportation

One of the fundamental aspects of Re-organisation would be to clearly demarcate the use of first-line equipment, particularly transportation. No administrative unit of any kind should be allocated first-line equipment except for small arms. A separate scheme for transportation for administrative units needs to be introduced. First line transport should be driven no more than a maximum of 500 miles each year, mostly during collective training, and no drivers' training should be conducted on first line transport. Our Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (EME) service has increased dramatically in numerical strength mainly because of non-standardisation of equipment and improper use of expensive first line transport. We should encourage private drivers training schools in the vicinity of cantonments and pay them for abinitio training

should avoid getting into NLC.

(FWO)

The Defence Services type projects. The National Logistics Cell was a brilliant idea when conceived but only as a temporary stop-gap measure. As a permanent establishment, officered and manned by the critical manpower of the Army, it is a counter-productive headache, a total wastage as an economic measure and a Public Relations disaster. NLC should be sold lock stock and barrel to the Fouji Foundation (or the Army Welfare Trust, etc) which should then run it as a private organisation named mostly by ex-service-men. Similarly, other organisations coming up on the same pattern in the Engineer Corps should be done away with.

The Frontier Works Organisation (FWO) has done a tremendous job but basically it should have remained a Control HQ and the service performed by private construction companies. The concept of the US Army Corps of Engineers being transferred to Pakistani

conditions is feasible but if we stick to the principles of contracting out work to qualified private companies. Similarly, the Military Dairy Farm idea should have been dropped as the Army expanded, the Army procuring its milk very much like it procures its other daily rations. Each of these organisations has drawn a lot of officers and men who have to be housed, their administrative needs attended to and so on and so forth till ultimately one is overwhelmed by the non-defence expenditures in the defence services.

Misuse of Combat Troops and Equipment

Use of combat troops for any purpose other than military should be strictly forbidden. Military parades are fine now and then but Horse and Carriage shows do not fit with today's image of the fighting Army. It is a diversion of officers and men for totally non-productive use. Hand it over to the civilians to run it and let them spend money and time for this type of extravagance. Similarly protocol duties of any nature should be strictly avoided as it detracts from the training cycle.

Universal Conscription

It is high time that we had universal conscription. National service plays a great part in integrating society during peace-time besides the fact that on general mobilisation in anticipation of war we should be able to call on the vast sources of our manpower potential. A professional Army capable of quick mobilisation will go much towards saving recurring expenditures. At the same time it inculcates a sense of comradeship and equality besides instilling discipline, which is seriously being affected in our youth. A large standing Army may be a definite contribution towards the economy as it provides for employment of our unskilled masses but universal conscription with innovative branches for medical care, transportation and other general services will make a tremendous difference towards our economic well-being. The mixture of various ethnic groups into one melting point will also significantly contribute to national integration, harmonising society as a whole.

To the Editor...

"Making Government Work"

Sir, I greatly enjoyed the article 'Hangovers from the Colonial Bureaucracy' written by your enigmatic 'Analyst' (May 28, 1995), not least for its candour and wit. Perhaps this is why the writer seeks anonymity — such forthright expression of opinion is not welcomed by 'polite society'.

The would like to augment some of 'Analyst's' comments though. Having, until recently, worked at a prominent national NGO, I would like to confirm that many of the deplorable practices of the state are being replicated in this self-styled 'third force too'.

There are superficial differences, however. The 'siring phenomenon' appears in NGOs as the 'Bhai-Bhai syndrome'. This has become a desirable and dishonest mockery of egalitarianism. Yes, one might claim that we are all equal in the NGO brother/sisterhood. Only some people are more equal than others.

For boss supremacy reigns supreme. Lengthy, inconclusive meetings, untempered calls to the 'manager's office for biscuit-munching and head-nodding and so on ad nauseam. Senior staff demand respect, whether or not they are themselves suitable qualified. Deference is prized over performance, pandering and ego massaging, or just plain bland jobbery, are valued over creativity and innovation.

Centralizing, bureaucratic tendencies in NGOs have much to do with the mendicant culture we create and occupy. Pompous and stately pretence has as much to do with psychological disposition as 'colonial inheritance'. The two, I dare say, are related. The grovelling mendacity of many an NGO staff is happily accommodated and reciprocated by vain and/or manipulative NGO manager — eerily reifying the Heyelian master-servant dialectic.

Many NGO managers have achieved seniority through this system; they are therefore its stakeholders and concerned

that it is propagated. Output, performance, efficiency and innovation are usually treated with circumspection. Younger staff for whom these are guiding principles are frequently treated with hostility.

It has been said that so long as the phenomenon of the bureaucratic mind or the charismatic leader holds sway, democracy will be virtually impossible in Bangladesh. But as we are, these are standard motifs of our society. Matthew Arnold once wrote that culture was made up of the cream of civilization. This is rubbish! Culture is composed of cream and scum together. The best and the worst together. There are no watertight compartments. What infects the state machinery also in fact NGOs because we are all elements of a social whole.

I think NGOs should recognize that they are not moral paragons, but the same hotch-potch of jobbers and egomaniacs as the rest of society. If the state is to improve by expunging its disgusting 'siring' sickness, the NGOs must also move

to abolish its structural dishonesties by bidding 'bye-bye' to the 'Bhai-Bhai' culture.

Abdul Hannan
Crescent Road,
Dhaka-1205

II

Sir, The column by Analyst, 'Making Government Work' is interesting and revealing, as it is written by a retired bureaucrat or civil servant.

The first thing noticeable is the style of writing. The commentary on Hangovers in the form of a 'note', which could have been expressed in half the space. It is well drafted and analysed but the conclusion is rather diffused and indecisive — passing on the buck.

Look at a modern consultancy report or article on management written by an outside expert. The contrast stands out. The sentences are in active form rather than the passivity of a file note. Action and key words are stressed and the paragraphs are short, rather than passive flow at a

leisurely pace. Anyone can watch on the TV how President Clinton speaks: sharp, clear, precise, and brief.

'Analyst' has to change over (not possible now!) from bureaucratise to popular style or journalism. More spicy, taking less time. The column may be continued — it is an education by itself.

A regular reader

Drastic action against Serbia needed

Sir, It never happened in the history of the United Nations. It was worse than the veto of a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

In defiance of all international laws, norms, conventions and usages a member of the UNO has openly insulted, challenged and threatened the United Nations. With the taking of many UN peacekeepers as hostages and using them as human shields to fend off UN approved air strikes against inhuman crimes committed by the Serbs in Serbia which is clandestinely fueling the crisis

in Bosnia has lost the credibility of remaining a member of the UNO.

We strongly feel that Serbia should not only be expelled from the UNO but time has also come for the UNO, EU, USA, NATO and OIC to take a joint military as well as diplomatic action against Serbia. As an immediate measure to save the life of the UN peacekeepers, all the Serbs living in foreign countries including France, the UK, and the USA may be put under arrest and then negotiations may be made with Serbian government for the release of UN peacekeepers.

We have made terrible mistake in the past holding peace talks and negotiations with Serb leader Rodovan Karadzic and his army commander Radko Mladic. There should not be any more discussion with them in future. Rather they may be tried as war criminals for the sake of stability in Europe and world peace.

O H Kabir
Dhaka-1203