

Log-jam

The Prime Minister's directive to the metropolitan traffic police authority to the effect that they streamline the completely broken down traffic system without much ado...

The high functionaries of the government who are there to advise her must be knowing all along that whatever may be the city traffic authority's own shortcomings they are exposing these while handling the end-results of other people's and agencies' inadequacies and uncoordinated performances.

In our sustained 'Save Dhaka' campaign, setting right the chaotic traffic has been high on the agenda. With the benefit of consultation with several multidisciplinary experts we have a recipe to offer on the subject.

As for details, the maximum allowable number of rickshaws has to be fixed with the unlicensed ones phased out; all forms of encroachment on pavements and roads have to be eliminated including the unauthorised bus-stops; unplanned road-diggings must cease; underground car parking lots need to be developed and extensively used; existing parking spaces must be clearly marked out; and over-bridges laid across suitable points.

It is time our obsession with eye-level development work starts yielding place to over-bridges, flyovers and underground parking lots like the tiny Singapore has gone for with what a tremendous effect everybody know.

Let These be Sustained

Congratulations to the police. They reacted with rare speed and effectiveness in both the Tanbazar and Islampur cases. Moreover, both the cases were example-setting ones in that they ideally combined watchdog journalism, human rights action and police operation.

How far Islampur is from the modern capital of a modern state? Spatially it may not be more than 50 kilometres. In this backyard of the capital city was going to be enacted a horror show befitting mediaeval Europe: burying a pregnant young woman upto the breast and killing her by flogging and stoning for the simple reason of being abandoned by her knight errant cousin who had set the course by raping her.

Two questions foul up this happy picture of things happening as they ideally should. Why wasn't there any local resistance even after the shalish broke up with people disagreeing with the punishment? The villages seem to be under some spell of terror from anything resembling fatwabazi.

Towards a National Theatre

Yes, this is quite a milestone. A two-day festival was opened on Thursday by Mayor Hanif, to celebrate that theatrical milestone. That evening the group theatre held the 200th stage presentation of Mamtazuddin Ahmed's play Shatghater Kanakori.

The big leap forward in the theatre in 1972 could take shape but for the very practical step taken by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: exempting theatrical presentations of entertainment tax. This was only to be followed by another long-awaited action of building professional show houses designed to cater exclusively to theatre, and there could be a revolutionary transformation of this art form so reflective of our life and society.

The Mahila Samity and Guide House-based theatre movement is heroic but too much too constricted to house a national endeavour. With more show houses, groups would have multiplied as would have the number of spectators. Theatre is about man — man in society.

HERE is, perhaps, no doubt that the fall of the autocratic regime in 1990 and its replacement with an elected government through a neutral, caretaker government in 1991 injected some glimmer of hopes for the citizens of a so-called "hopeless" and "bottomless" state of Bangladesh.

It does not need an opponent of the ruling BNP to air such frustrations. The Hon'ble Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman himself ventilated some of the vital gaps between the ruling party's preachings and practices during the four-year rule as our elected government. It may be mentioned here that the Finance Minister is considered to be the architect of the various reform programmes so far spearheaded in Bangladesh.

FM's Frank and Fledgy Frustrations

It is upto the voters to judge whether the ruling party bagged more debits than credits or vice versa during its tenure in office. Unfortunately, there is very few, like the Finance Minister, in the present cabinet to tell the truth and frankly admit frustrations.

rate: a slimmer budget deficit; more endogenous resources for ADPs etc. These are the gifts from reform measures which policy makers can rightly boast of, if they prefer to do so.

One should share the view that economic reforms and adjustments are those economic imperatives, of today's global and local scenario, that we can hardly live without. The de trop state interventions in every sphere of our economic life, the monumental losses of our public sector enterprises, the pervasiveness of loan defaults, the greed of the ill conceived private sector, and the skyrocketing public revenue expenditure at the cost of developmental needs, the unfortunate vagaries in the social sectors etc. appeared to be the rules of the economic games in the 1970s and the 1980s.

No Loaf is Better than Half

There is a saying that half a loaf is better than no loaf. As far as reforms are concerned, the reverse could be true where 'no reform' rates better than 'some reforms'. There has been very little progress with respect to legal reforms — the capstan of a private sector-led development. Throughout its long

four-year tenure, the government has miserably failed to table any reforms on this score. Needless to mention, growth or investments (both local and foreign) and commerce hinge on the legal framework of the country and its legal framework, as it exists now, seems outdated and not in touch with the growing global changes.

The public administration is perhaps at its lowest ebb in terms of efficiency. Corruption, red-tapism and unionism go rampant in public administration. While the economic policies are made outward oriented and market friendly, the public administration still groans under centralized, politicised environment. No attempt so far could be in evidence in fine-tuning public administration.

While the journey towards economic reforms started with full enthusiasm, it suddenly stopped in the middle. It is being hypothesized (and

failed to deliver so far is an assurance to the investors that all is well with the available package.

In every country, anywhere in the world, reform programmes usually do not get a clear 'go'. Since adjustments and reforms bear terrible costs to the society or to a part of the society at least for a period of time, the obvious resistance always tends to reside and it is the initiator of reforms (in this case government), who has to build consensus around reforms. How far the government succeeded in doing that? The Finance Minister is reported to have aired the need for a political consensus but seemed very little enthusiastic in describing the reasons behind the failure.

Fleckless Feathers

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Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



as reported by the national dailies, expressed his annoyance over the failure of his own Finance Ministry moving at a tortoise speed with reform agenda.

The power and telecommunication sector, historically under the public sector, continues to miserably fail in delivering goods at reasonable efficiency to both households and industry, commerce and service sectors. The privatization of the telecommunications sector is yet to take place and with it, the growth of the economy is shelved for the distant future.

the Finance Minister is also reported to go by that) that half-hearted and donor-dosed reforms did more damage to the economy and to the society. Economic reforms should be treated as a package, and any element of that package not fully cognized, might adversely affect the performance of the other members in the package.

An Election?— That's Not Democratic, Claim the Opposition

Mukul Sharma and Mohan Mainali writes from Kathmandu

NEPAL'S communist government is being accused to trying to subvert democracy — by holding an election.

It is a conspiracy or grand design against democracy," said Girija Prasad Koirala, former Prime Minister and Nepali Congress leader.

His view is echoed by other opposition parties. Says Surya Bahadur Thapa of the right-wing Rastriya Prajatantra Party: "The communists are trying to thwart parliamentary democracy by recommending mid-term polls."

Opposition anger was sparked by a deft political manoeuvre by Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari to preempt an opposition vote of no-confidence.

The King agreed, announced fresh elections for November and asked the Prime Minister and his Council of Ministers to continue in office until the formation of a new government.

Opposition leaders complain that the minority government's move is a violation of democratic norms and that it is too soon for another election: the previous polls was in November 1994.

The people were fed up with the government," says Congress leader Koirala. "It was systematically annihilating its political opponents and attacking the roots of democracy, such as the press and the judiciary. By seeking to dislodge it, we were only doing our national duty."

A former Speaker, Daman Nath Dhungana, considers that "The frequent dissolution of the House is dangerous for the democracy."

John Major resigned from the party leadership after a bitter policy squabbling over European union. He, however, won a clear victory in his battle for the leadership of the ruling Conservative Party. He has confuted his critics that politics is meant for the personal benefit of an individual or a group of persons. We congratulate the British Prime Minister on his

Nepal - from monarchy to multi-party democracy

1951: Nepalese Congress Party overthrows feudal Rana regime
1960: Parliament dissolved. Prime Minister B.P. Koirala arrested, political parties banned
1962: Direct rule by King
1980: King Birendra wins plebiscite to continue non-party Panchayat system
1990: King forced to declare constitutional monarchy
1991: Congress wins elections, G.P. Koirala becomes Prime Minister
1994: Man Mohan Adhikari heads a communist-led government after mid-term elections
1995: Adhikari calls November election

Infographic showing a map of Nepal and portraits of King Birendra, G.P. Koirala, and Man Mohan Adhikari. Includes a scale bar for 100 miles/160 km.

Adhikari, however, blames the Opposition for Parliament's short life: "Why didn't they wait for our first policy paper and Budget before they decided to topple the minority government?" he asks. "I did not have any other option."

Adhikari says that the Communist Party (United Marxist and Leninist) — which won 88 of the 205 seats in the November election — will campaign for an even stronger mandate.

"We will be more pro-people, more pro-village, more progressive in the coming months."

"We will go the people with our own comprehensive programmes. We will say to them that we are not being allowed to implement our

politics. The politics of this country will be sharply polarised between the Left and the Right; but we will fight and win."

One of its key programmes is the "Build Our Village Ourselves" programme, under which the government plans to provide Rs500,000 to each of 4,000 village development committees.

A resident of Moolpani village near Kathmandu told the press that "this type of development mechanism has started for the first time in this country and it works honestly. Now we are in a position to decide whether we want to construct a school or a road."

Support for the government's policy of providing re-

lief even before trying to change the basic structures of society came from Mani, a young agricultural worker from Khuria village: "Now my children are getting free education until class nine. There is some financial help for deprived communities, and they are also trying to introduce a public distribution system for essential commodities."

The government has promised a land reform bill and measures to abolish bonded labour. Estimates put the number of bonded labourers and landless people at 250,000.

Opposition parties are worried that the caretaker government may "bribe" voters by launching populist

OPINION

halt," says senior party official Devi Prasad Ojha. And there is a price to pay. Last year's election cost more than \$23 million — which would finance a literacy drive for 200,000 people in a country with a literacy rate of only 39 per cent and average income per head of under \$200 a year.

But as Kanak Mani Dixit, editor of Himal magazine points out, "We are a fast-forward democracy. A series of events took place within a short space of time. But the positive thing is that we are successfully experimenting with democracy, without resorting to any other way out."

MUKUL SHARMA is an Indian journalist. MOHAN MAINALI is a Nepalese freelancer.

Traffic and Roundabout

M M Ahmad

A correspondent suggested in your opinion column that the overcrowded street intersections in Dhaka city fitted with traffic light signals be converted into roundabouts without lights. The idea looks all right on paper, but practically it has been found, in Kuala Lumpur and New Delhi, for example, that roundabout is all right for low-density traffic; as later, with increase in traffic density, traffic lights had to be installed at the four roads around the roundabout to control the entry and exit of vehicles into and out of the roundabout. This can be easily verified through computer simulation.

The problem is not with the system, but those who use the system; that is, it is a human problem of indiscipline. This chaotic condition at the traffic lights or intersections is due to the disparity in the level of the drivers of the different types of vehicles. There are two types of disorderly behaviour: one while stationary, and the other while moving, or beginning to move. Generally it is the lack of civic sense, not seen in cities like Tokyo, where the traffic is as dense. Do not allow lane changing before the red light, and the situation will ease considerably. An insecure mind (in an undeveloped society) is in a hurry not to miss his rights (that is why the queue system does not work).

The main roads may be widened. Remove the footpath from one side of the road (when there is no other option) left to widen the road). There should be separate lane at a different level for the non-mechanised vehicles such as pedal rickshaws, hand carts. Other types of restrictions may be tried. Depending on the location: no entry; restricted right turn; no halting or

parking within 25 metres of intersection (this is a universal practice; the skirt is marked yellow); no parking on main roads. The present bus stops on the main roads are designed for one bus, whereas two to four buses need the stop at one time. Cut down the waiting period. Remove a section of the footpath (equal to three bus lengths) to create a diversion for the bus stop, away from the road. No rickshaw may use the boxed bus stop area. Any arrangement will fail (Murphy) if the road is overloaded four to ten times the designed load condition. Secondly, the current sanctioned strength of the traffic police is utterly inadequate to handle the vastly increased number of vehicles plying today in an environment bordering on anarchy. It is necessary to curb the demand-supply situation: unlimited growth simply cannot be allowed in any sector (note the huge tax on private cars in Singapore). Some unauthorised rickshaws and drivers have been challenged, but the effect is not visible, although the hiring charge is creeping up a little bit. The new business and shopping areas and multistoried buildings have to be carefully approved so as not to increase the density. Dispersal is the name of the game. Democracy does not mean laxity in regulation, implementation, supervision, control, and prosecution. In the first place, a situation may not be allowed to get out of hand. Secondly, strictness has to be imposed (we are willing to suffer in public interest). The overcrowding and unauthorised use of the footpaths is as bad as that prevailing on the roads. Can we please have some system in the madness? There is a limit to means of popularity.

To the Editor...

John Major and politicians

Sir, British Prime Minister John Major has taught all the politicians as to how to glow the leadership with brightness and effulgence. He does not possess any famous trade mark like umbrella of Nevell Chamberlain or the cigar of Sir Winston Churchill. But his simple "put up or shut up" theory has made him great.

John Major resigned from the party leadership after a bitter policy squabbling over European union. He, however, won a clear victory in his battle for the leadership of the ruling Conservative Party. He has confuted his critics that politics is meant for the personal benefit of an individual or a group of persons. We congratulate the British Prime Minister on his political courage, foresight and success.

What are the rules of load shedding?

Sir, there is any specific order or instruction from the DESA for enforcing load shedding. These days we find electricity goes and comes of its whims. But what a disturbance, inconvenience and

torture inflicted on us! I am a heart patient. There must be lot of other old and serious patients in the city. Who will be responsible for the deterioration of their conditions? Who will bear the medical expenses if they are to rush to the hospital or private clinics due to disruption of electric supply leading to discontinuation of utility operation in their houses? We are, a several lakhs of people, are living in the greater Mirpur area comprising Mirpur, Shewrapara, Ibrahimpur, Kachukhet Pura Bazar-Natun Bazar, Uttar Kafrul-Pashchim Kafrul-Purbo Kafrul-Dakhin Kafrul etc. Loadshedding has been 'imposed' in these areas permanently. And to add salt to injury, the power supply is disrupted almost every now and then, though for a short period. Thank God, residents

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of this area (South Kafrul, when I live) do not know (except my close friends) that I had served with Power Development Board for long 20 years as a Dy Director till I retired in 1983. There was no such loadshedding in those days, although corruption was prevalent in all walks of life, but certain not at such scale as of to-day.

May I be permitted to ask a pertinent and salient question: Why there is no load shedding in Banani, Gulshan, Baridhara, and Dhaka Cantonment areas? Answer to this question is perhaps very clear — push areas where the elite side. So they cannot be put to suffering where as nobody is supposed to bother about the sufferings of our class of people!

PL. LI (R) A B M Mahuuddin Dhaka-1206.