

Code of Conduct for Polls

Responses to the Election Commission's (EC) code of conducts have come from a few political parties. Both the ruling party and the Awami League have sent in their opinions.

AL has expressed its disappointment at the EC proposal. It wants a more stringent code. To the extent that both parties want the EC to have a code, there is a great deal of convergence of opinions between the two parties. As far as the ruling party is concerned, it agrees with the EC almost on all the points except just one. The note of dissent concerns the modus operandi of the formation of an all-party election coordination committee as proposed. It is however the AL that has put forward quite a number of good suggestions and alternative ideas. It has gone far beyond what the EC has come up with. Its proposal for turning the codes into laws is indeed a radical suggestion that — if implemented — can have far-reaching impact on our election.

While we favour such a move, we also find merits in the various other details worked out by the AL. For example, its proposal for declaring the candidacy of loan defaulters as ineligible and for banning the use or abuse of religions and prayer houses etc demands attention. The maximum expenditure for election campaign for a candidate has been proposed at a reasonable amount of Taka three lakh. The AL has also charged that the EC has not proposed anything to curb or restrict the abuse of state facilities by the ruling party. The EC may not have precisely done that but it surely asks for equal rights for all parties to election campaign and seeks to restrict the use of certain government establishments and facilities. That may not be enough however. Since both parties have agreed to most of the EC-framed points, that can be the basis of negotiations between the two leading political parties. The EC can be the host to such a dialogue. Informed and enlightened, the discussion can help evolve a comprehensive set of rules or a code of conduct for holding polls.

More and Better Buses, Now

Something must be done to lend some sense of reality to the rickshaw situation. It is not the business of the rickshaws to clog the city roads and streets. They carry people. If there weren't enough people to hire them, there wouldn't be so many of them.

The Road Transport Authority and Dhaka City Corporation, and indeed the Ministry of Communications before that, should realise that failure to address the city transport needs in an economical and efficient way creates a void that the rickshaw growth fills up. Both rickshaws and cars occupy the most road-space while carrying the least passengers. A far more efficient passenger-road space ratio of road-use is scored by buses, specially the double-deckers. Motor scooters or baby-taxis take the same space as rickshaws for carrying about the same number of passengers. Tempos serve better than rickshaws but is a source of heavy atmospheric pollution.

Legislation and penal executive action cannot by themselves bring down the number of rickshaws or even restrict its growth. The demand for a rickshaw-ride must be made to taper off after a time. Introduction of more buses, a lot more, say, doubling the present seating capacity, can do the trick.

Some tips to make such a bus boom click and not to boost our tribulations as Dhaka dwellers: 1. Let the best part of the new buses be double-deckers; 2. Let all such be truly sitting-only buses attended by educated stewards; 3. Let these ply strictly between set-down points and have doors closing automatically; 4. Let these buses be almost a privilege to ride and charge a special rate for that.

How will the government effect these tips is for the government to work out. For the moment we should all agree that better and more buses are the only way to contain the growing rickshaw problem which is but an expression of the unsolved public transport challenge of this city.

A Dangerous Dip

One can now so easily term, without fear to be controverted, Chittagong the city of abductors. And Dhaka? A city of murders, specially of murdered wives.

Another wife, 16-year old Sundari, was murdered on Tuesday supposedly by her hotel-boy husband. And a young man, 19-year old electrician Sohel Rana, was stabbed to death by a gang near his father's Jurain house the same day. In Gulshan two young men were abducted and then mauled badly by cutting the arteries of both hands and feet. The same day.

The drama of the Fakri kidnap case had hardly subsided in the minds of citizens when Chittagong was back to its infamous abduction streak. On Tuesday a businessman was abducted in Raozan and a demand for Tk 50,000 in ransom made.

Why and how have things come to such a sad pass? There is that overriding reason of unemployment and poverty made the more menacing by political parties promoting mastani among young people and buying them up to do the dirty things of politics. There are sociological reasons as well.

The fact that the thousand-handed God called the government, backed up wholly by the absolute and exhaustive powers of the state has not taken pains to come to grips with society's continual dip into anarchy or failure of governance will rise stupendously above all others contributive reasons. There shouldn't be any doubt about that.

Each violent death and criminal killing diminishes the government. And the state. So beware, those in the helms.

IN today's high-tech world of excellent communications, no country seems less important than the other, yet some countries are certainly more important in the context of external relations. For any Third World country, superpowers are important. In the present situation of only one superpower remaining for the time being, a good relationship with USA becomes most important.

For Pakistan, given our proximity with China and the history of our strong neutral friendship thereof, China occupies a special pedestal equalling that of a superpower, which in any case it is well on the way to becoming in the 21st century. If we were to define our foreign policy in concentric circles where USA and China come in vertically having special bilateral relationships, the core circle would contain Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan with a very special for Bangladesh. The second and larger circle would include UAE, the other Gulf States, the Central Asian States and Sri Lanka, the third circle the European Community, ASEAN and East Asia, and so on. While we make a lot of effort with respect to Muslim countries, in return we do not get back much from them as a group, individually some nations have always been of great support. Now that many of the Arab countries have diplomatic relations with Israel, particularly the Palestinians, why should we seek to remain out in the cold?

The major objective of any foreign policy is to ensure the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country. Anything that compromises the security of the nation negates this primary mission. Once we have secured the nation thus, we follow a policy that enhances the relationships between countries. Throughout the ages, economic inter-action formulates diplomatic relationships. In the modern world the thrust of diplomacy is basically economic. To that end our diplomats have to be much more trade oriented than previously was. Economic orientation and knowledge is a major qualification requirement for the modern diplomat. The Pakistani diplomat has to thus not only be an ambassador of goodwill but one who

can turn that goodwill into trade revenues for earning foreign exchange. The performance of diplomats must be judged also on their success in trade-related issues.

The first guideline we must lay down is that the persons chosen for diplomatic assignments for Pakistan must have firm roots in Pakistan. Pakistanis will be shocked to know that at least two Pakistani Ambassadors to the USA have since settled permanently in the US and are now US citizens. Ambassador Sultan Mohammad Khan acquired a Green Card after his first tenure and subsequently became a US citizen after his second stint as Ambassador. Similarly, Jamshed Marker acquired property and a Green Card during his first tenure as Pakistan's Ambassador to the US. He was shifted by the first Ms Benazir regime from Washington DC to the UN at New York. When Mian Nawaz Sharif came back to power, he wanted to move him back to Washington DC but, (on the strength of lobbying by Mian Sahib's good friend Saeed), Ambassador Marker requested that he be allowed to stay at the UN as there would be problems about his diplomatic immunity and accreditation thereof because of the fact that he was a US citizen. A US citizen was 'therefore' Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, having a seat in the UN Security Council. Without casting any aspersion on their characters, one does challenge their ability to represent the country of their birth while in the twilight of their years they chose to stay in another country till death, having at best, divided loyalties and, therefore, little commitment.

This phenomena is not confined to Pakistan vis-a-vis the US (and UK) alone, almost all Third World countries face the same dilemma with respect to their diplomats as well as other nationals serving various international organisations in the

Pakistan's Foreign Policy

Sequencing The Future

Now that many of the Arab countries have diplomatic relations with Israel, particularly the Palestinians, why should we seek to remain out in the cold?

US, UK and Canada. Within days of Begum Abida Hussain's arrival in Washington DC as Pakistan's Ambassador to the US, a well-connected lady real-estate agent called on her with a list of properties for sale and was quite shocked when the new Ambassador refused. 'Everybody buys property in the States!', she exclaimed. According to some statistics about 35 to 40 per cent of those posted in US and UK do, a fair percentage of these ultimately settle down abroad. Given that Green Cards and citizenships of the first world cannot be bought off the shelf, one wonders what may have been the quid pro quo? A few years ago, we

view a pragmatic layman's view. The problem arises in laying out policy and keeping it from being influenced by personalities having vested interests. This is hardly possible. This becomes doubly difficult when there is a collapse of direction in policy-making. As such great care has to be taken in the selection of personnel for foreign postings, particularly the political appointees and those from ISI and IB. There is no doubt that Pakistan has an excellent cadre of young, dynamic foreign service officers and also from time to time, a clear announcement of our foreign policy objectives. However, if in an embassy, the senior-most person from

is shown to be trying to accomplish an Afghan solution whereas Gens Zia and Akhtar Abdur Rahman were viscerally opposed to it at the best of the US. Instead of the military hierarchy being involved on a day-to-day basis which would be counter-productive and unwieldy, the conduit mechanism is the ISI. During the 80s Afghan decade, ISI dominated the Foreign office in formulating policy, both because of Martial Law and the Afghan Civil war in which it was deeply involved. It continues to have a very dominant role despite the fact that foreign policy should be the elected Ms Bhutto's strong suit. Even after the elected government came to power that last ISI Chief continued to hold a virtual veto power over ambassadorial appointment and the final say in relations with the 'special' nations (contrary to belief that Ms Bhutto sent Dr Muleeha Lodhi to Washington DC ability notwithstanding she seems to be more Qazi's choice based on her close association with the late COAS, Gen Asif Nawaz, a near relative of Qazi). Being the conduit for foreign policy for the military hierarchy, DG ISI had assumed super-Foreign Minister status during the Balakh Sher Caretaker Government in 1993 and continued to do so in the presence of our ineffectual Sardar Assef Ali.

This is counter productive to ISI's actual mission of protecting the integrity and sovereignty of the country from external subversion. Moreover, as the DG ISI is interested in pursuing a more personal agenda, then we are in trouble — like we are in seriously today. While both Lt Gens Hameed Gul and Asad Durrani were nationalists who were brilliant career officers with an excellent command of their job parameters, Lt Gen Javed Nasir got sidetracked (or overwhelmed) by religion in his 'appreciation' of the situation. This led to certain initiatives with unfortunate con-

sequences to our long term relationships with some special friends. Having fought a superpower to a standstill, the ISI over-reached itself in spreading the message — 'insurrection would have been the better part of enthusiasm. Net result was that we almost found ourselves in the company of nations declared as sponsors of terrorism. In defence of Javed Nasir one can only state that at least he was not pursuing a selfish agenda in contrast to his successor, Javed Ashraf Qazi, whose only agenda during his time has been manipulating his own accession to the COAS chair.

Unfortunately in trying to satisfy the military hierarchy, the Ms Benazir Government has taken the heat for this man's complete destruction of a decade-long effort in both Afghanistan and Kashmir, years of sacrifice have gone down the drain. The tragedy is that while the ISI head should theoretically be representative of the collective military viewpoint, on the other hand GHQ depends upon him to understand the policy initiatives of the civilian government, a situation custom-built for manipulation. This is why selection of personnel for critical posts becomes extremely important.

A coordinated foreign policy which is well announced and is implemented in letter and spirit is the need of the hour. We are living in dangerous times, unfortunately our selection of people through the spectrum has been faulty despite all the available information that should have guided us to select people with commitment and ability for the right slots. We have a vast reservoir of dynamic foreign service officers who are dedicated people of great ability. We should pay more heed to their views based on their experience. Except for odd exceptions, they have been the strong spine holding up a very shallow foreign policy. They are the specialists selected and groomed for this discipline, we must ensure that every one of our embassies and consulates have a fair number of career foreign service officers. For sequencing our future in a more organised manner let us depend more upon the analysis and advice of our foreign service professionals.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

moved a resolution on Kashmir at the UN Security Council while we were members of the Council. It is a considered opinion of all knowledgeable analysts that this resolution had an excellent chance of success but was withdrawn at the last minute because of our ambassador's intercession. A friend of mine calls this the 'minimalist approach syndrome', an attitude that accepts whatever little we get in deference to the strength of the other side, instead of doing hard bargaining for the sake of the country.

While foreign policy is too intricate to be described 'in sweeping statements by laymen' as the Pakistan Embassy in Dhaka states in a rather confusing and 'sweeping' (what fact were they contradicting?) rejoinder to the first of the articles of the present series, the broad outlines can be laid out by anyone seriously interested in the continued welfare of the country, incidentally this includes the common man in the street who

the foreign service cadre is at the most a Second Secretary, the others being either political appointees, ISI and/or IB men, how can we expect the outnumbered diplomats in that post to efficiently perform foreign policy functions? There is a dichotomy here that persists in the implementation of policy at the senior level of our foreign service cadre. The ratio of foreign service cadres to other officers in each diplomatic post must be increased.

Foreign Policy creation must be the prerogative of the elected government. Since elected governments have a limited time span, the Foreign office exists to do the basic staff work in formulating and then implementing policy. In almost all Third World countries, in particular Muslim countries, the Armed Forces have a donnant (but mostly silent) say in the creation of foreign policy initiatives. Pakistan is no exception. In a recent book by Selig Harrison, 1980's Foreign Secretary Agha Shahi

On Postings and Transfers

There is a great dearth of professionalism in the manner in which postings and transfers are handled by the personnel wings. Crude rules of thumb, arbitrariness and hasty decisions based on inadequate information and little thought are endemic.

A sound principle of personnel management is to find the right kind of posting for the official concerned, allow him/her operational autonomy and then let him/her remain in that post for a sufficient period of time in order to extract the best out of him/her. Unfortunately, nowadays this is hardly followed in the Bangladesh government. The main problem of postings and transfers in Bangladesh is that these are too frequent. The three years rule/convention is more honoured in the breach, than the observance. Consequently, an officer is asked to leave his/her post before even he/she has understood the nature of work to be performed, let alone contribute anything substantial. All this has a heavy cost in terms of dislocation of the family, disruption of children's education, higher transfer allowances, loss of official work and consequent suffering to the people and demoralization of the officer, to name the more important ones.

Another frequently encountered problem is the use of penal posting. It is generally somewhere in the Chittagong Hill Tracts or some such 'hardship' station. Even if the official transferred deserves some punishment, this particular form of punishment ultimately leads to the punishment of the local people rather than the official. Also, once this is known to the local people (and indeed there is no way this can be prevented), it is not fair to expect the local people to show respect for a government that sends its disgraced officials to serve them. On the other hand, if the official is innocent and has been victimized because he failed to carry out an illegal order, it is quite likely that he/she may now respond by really turning bad, since by remaining principled, he/she has only suffered a punish-

ment posting. It is like sending an innocent person to jail and then have a hardened criminal come out of it after the prison sentence has been served. So this cannot be the solution, and accordingly an adequate alternative has to be found out.

The third major problem is the heavy tadbir associated with postings and transfers. For example, some officials will go all out to stop a transfer outside Dhaka, even if the three-year rule has been observed and it is not the last posting before retirement either. Obviously, those with powerful connections or ready to spend money get away successfully, while the less fortunate ones are driven from pillar to post without any respite. Similarly, there are strong tadbirs for certain postings. Common examples are Commissioners, DCs, SPs, TNOs, OCs, certain specified places in Income Tax, Customs, Police, Forest, Water Board, Power Board, Roads and Highways, Health, etc. Various considerations come into play, such as career advancement, power and prestige, facilities (in the form of free transport and housing, better education and medical care, low or subsidized prices of daily necessities, frequent foreign trips, provision for private practice), bribe, etc.

Conversely, there is strong tadbir to avoid postings which are not so juicy. Various pretexts are concocted to hide the real intention, particularly if it relates to taking bribes. For example, I was once approached by a junior police official to have him posted to

the Dhaka airport in order to 'gain experience in security work'. I suspected that his real intention was very different so I refused his tadbir. Closely related to tadbir is political interference in postings and transfers. This is true of all regimes in Bangladesh, including the present one. But it would not be fair to blame the political elite alone for this. More often than not, the official concerned may have made the life of the political person miserable by pestering him/her for getting or cancelling a certain posting. In this maneuvering, the trick often employed is to paint oneself in a particular colour

versals of decisions are common, many important posts remain unfilled for a long time and frustration abounds. Finally, the bottom line is that given the general deterioration in the quality of officers across the board, a high 'turn over' through frequent transfers and postings can hardly be avoided.

A number of suggestions are in order for solving the transfer and posting problems enumerated above. Firstly, the authority for recruitment, postings and transfers should be decentralized as far as possible, since in the present highly centralized system, transparency is minimal and

placed on further nationalization of educational institutions so that there is no additional burden of transfers and postings on personnel organizations already under heavy stress. Thirdly, the practice of penal posting should be forthwith discontinued. It is better to make an official OSD, if punishment is at all to be given, and then attach him/her to some Department/Office so that some work can be extracted out of him/her. However, the best course is to start departmental proceedings or a corruption case if indeed the authorities have a prima facie case against the official. Otherwise, nothing should be done against him/her only on the basis of a hunch or a strong personal dislike. As argued earlier, sending an officer on punishment posting is an exercise in futility.

Fourthly, each Minister, Department/Office should officially identify the prize postings, draw up detailed criteria to be followed in filling such posts and then widely publicize the same. It will then be difficult to ignore these criteria once such transparency is adopted formally and publicly. Fifthly, the highest political leadership has to convince MPs and other important leaders of all parties that they should generally refrain from interfering with the normal work of the government machinery, which includes dealing with postings and transfers. Perhaps a series of representative round table meetings should be organized jointly by the media and the citizens committees in order to hammer out this and similar issues so that more specific

practical solutions may be offered. Sixthly, the personnel wings dealing with postings and transfers need to be professionalised through training (both classroom-based as well as on the job), supervision and guidance, and better management of information on personnel matters. In the latter regard, computerization of personnel records could be of great use, if retrieval of information is made easy and policy makers are indeed ready to use such information.

Seventhly, the time has come to reconsider the age old ban on transfers and postings to one's own district. This principle not only reduces the options open to the personnel wing and thereby make its work more difficult, but it may have also become redundant in view of the high degree of inter-district mobility through education, marriage, change of residence, improvements in transport and communication, etc. and increase in the number of districts. Eighthly, improvements in transport and communications and provision of basic amenities particularly in education and health in the far flung areas of the country should gradually lower the number of 'tadbirs' related to postings and transfers to places out of Dhaka and other big cities. Finally, in the long run, improvement in the quality of officers through better recruitment, grooming and training alone can reverse the present transfer and posting situation.

It is no use pretending that these suggestions are easy to implement, particularly in an environment where the quality of officials has sharply deteriorated. But given the political will and commitment to good governance, these are not too difficult to get on with either. We do not have much choice left in this regard anyway.

Making Government Work

By Anwar

in order to soften up a political heavyweight in one's favour. So, the official concerned generally turns into an ardent supporter of the party in power in order to get his work done. There are, of course, also 'districtism', ties of kinship or friendship and ultimately the 'cash nexus' behind some of the political interference. The adverse effects of such transfers and postings on work and morale hardly need any elaboration.

Fourthly, there is a great dearth of professionalism in the manner in which postings and transfers are handled by the personnel wings. Crude rules of thumb, arbitrariness and hasty decisions based on inadequate information and little thought are endemic. Consequently, re-

result of their misdeeds. In case of the Biharis in Bangladesh, right on the emergence of Bangladesh, in spite of their criminal acts during the War of Independence, they were given an option to accept Bangladeshi nationality but most of them declined to accept this. The intention behind this refusal was the possible expectation of mass repatriation to Pakistan. However, they could not imagine the insincerity of the Pakistan authorities — including late Mr Bhutto.

How can an independent state of Pakistan allow their citizens as Mohajirs after a

Favourite daily

Sir, The Daily Star is my favourite newspaper for many reasons. It contains current political news and views, national and international, interesting features — local and foreign; development stories; enlightening editorials and post editorials.

As a regular reader I would like to read in my favourite daily more articles on science, philosophy, psychology and economics also in the Weekend Magazine section.

MAM  
Dhaka Cantt

M Khan  
Manikgonj

To the Editor...

MQM in Pakistan

Sir, The longdrawn inhuman, senseless, fratricidal fight in Karachi between MQM supporters and their rivals is really not understandable. I would like to start with the question of MQM — who are they and what are their intentions? Pakistan was created as a homeland for the Muslims. It is a historical fact that all Muslims (except a few because of their affiliation with Indian National Congress or otherwise) of India wanted and fought for Pakistan when partition was inevitable. At

the same time it may be noted that it would not have been possible for all Muslims in India to migrate to Pakistan for various reasons. Indian Muslims had option to migrate to East Pakistan, Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan or North West Frontier Province. But once migrated and settled to any of these provinces they found a new identity as Pakistanis for all earlier affiliations. It is though very painful to leave one's own ancestral homeland but the circumstances so created called for a life-time decision whether to migrate or not. The Muslims

who decided to stay back were to be identified themselves as Indians.

Following the partition of India, a large number of Muslims migrated to the then East Pakistan and like MQM of Karachi insisted maintaining a separate identity of their own with the very active encouragement, support and patronisation of the then Central Government. The West Pakistani leaders created a Frankestein and now are victim of their own misdeeds. There is a saying that 'as you sow, so you reap'. The present blood letting in Pakistan is a direct

result of their misdeeds. In case of the Biharis in Bangladesh, right on the emergence of Bangladesh, in spite of their criminal acts during the War of Independence, they were given an option to accept Bangladeshi nationality but most of them declined to accept this. The intention behind this refusal was the possible expectation of mass repatriation to Pakistan. However, they could not imagine the insincerity of the Pakistan authorities — including late Mr Bhutto.

lapse of 48 years instead of identifying and showing their unfettered loyalty and solidarity with the country of their permanent residence. It is a pity that even very highly educated intelligent lot including Dehlvis etc are behind this agitation. It is suggested for the betterment of the new generation to throw the word 'Mohajir' finally from their thought and vocabulary and then agitate for rightful grievances. It is only then they would earn the sympathy of all to their cause.