

An Industrial Myth

A survey report jointly sponsored by the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has disproved a myth. It concerns industrial production loss or even closure due to labour unrest. The country recorded a loss of only seven per cent of the total days wasted, thanks to labour disputes — both inside and outside of the units. The major contributors to low production and closure of industrial units, instead, have been shortage of working capital and power failure. Their respective shares in the production loss are 40.28 per cent and 30.47 per cent.

Evidently putting the blame on labour unrest for the poor performance of our industries should be viewed as an attempt to shift the focus from the real problem. Proper detection of the industrial malaise is the first step towards addressing the overall problems afflicting our industrial sector. An issue like the labour unrest which accounts for less than half the production loss caused by poor maintenance work (15.70 per cent) can only be blown up with some ill motive. One of the casualties is obviously clarity. Like the lack of administrative transparency, this too erodes people's confidence in the country's ability to deliver something of value.

Now that we know where things have gone wrong, we need not go far to decide our priorities. The lopsided diagnosis of the industrial ailment is clearly behind our failure to attract foreign investors in a significant way. The onus is obviously on us. First of all, we need to do a lot of vigorous ground-work to put our house in order. Then we can invite foreign investors to put their money in. The power sector must radically improve its performance before we can ask for working capital investment.

As high as 27.5 per cent of the private manufacturing units operate below 50 per cent of their capacity; 39.5 per cent between 51 and 75 per cent and only 32 per cent units have had a capacity utilisation rate above 75 per cent but below 82 per cent. The pattern will change if we can bring improvement where we should within our own resources.

Mental Care

One in every 14 persons in Bangladesh is a mental case. There are cases of acute mental disorder in 11 persons out of a thousand here. A total of 84 lakh people are mentally ill in this nation. This is a group bigger than all groups of afflicted people. This is a number that can constitute an independent state — Israel and even Holland and Belgium have less people. Shall we call ours a nation of lunatics?

One wouldn't think the poser is an unfair dig, albeit unmeaning, if some other figures are presented. We have less than a half psychiatrist for every million of our people. The figure is about 4 for Thailand, 21 for Indonesia and 144 for Sweden. Only the insensate can sleep sound with 8 million-plus mental patients lurking throughout the nation and do nothing about it. Indeed the strength of the mentally ill would go further up if those in the villages who, taking the mentally derelict to be affected by ghosts and jin persecute them inhumanly, are counted in.

It is good news, therefore, that a Tk 25-crore institute for mental health and research is going to be set up. And also that the Hemayetpur facility is to get a Tk 6-crore shot in the arms. Mental disease would be claiming more and more victims if only because of a population bursting at the seams. Add to that the awful societal condition which tallies to make Bangladesh to be among the poorest in the quality-of-life reading. While leaders of the society, political, cultural and economic — must between them ensure a harmonious society, enough doctors should be there to heal the already afflicted only.

The whole of our qualified healers' profession lacks badly both in professionalism and a plain sense of commitment to the individual patient. Even if we have mental healers in the ratio of Sweden, things would not improve if they do not put their mind into the job of nursing minds to normalcy — as far as possible — with care, love and respect.

A Matter of Pride

The suspense hanging the whole world on tenterhooks is gone. But is it indeed? The eyes glued to the sixty-four black and white squares for a month had expected the Kasparov-Anand encounter to continue undecided to the last game. But on the 17th outing Kasparov amassed 10 and retained his world title. There was only one thing left in the match — the champion needs only a draw out of the three remaining games to win the match and get his pot of a million dollars. This is a prospect as good as decided.

The match decider was but one single silly move, silly even by village chess standards, that smothered an Anand's happy and secure romping position in the 11th game. After that a demoralised Anand could not gather himself together to close the one-point gap that yawned and yawned to become a three-point unnegotiable chasm. Many, including Anand himself, is blaming the anticlimactic matchending on lack of experience on the loser's part. That's very easy to say. And it's very easy to see that Anand this time never played his usual attacking game and it was Kasparov who also scored on the fast-play score, which had been an Anand specialty. What is best left to conjectures — being made in profession as an aftermath — is who or what made him forego his own game.

World number two from our subcontinent — that's not a small thing. And Anand earned it all through head and grit. Let this be our pride and not consolation.

System Failure?

If the mandate of the Caretakers had been extended for a period of one to two years to include comprehensive electoral and administrative reform, the malady that is now afflicting the body-politic and causing recurring system failure could have been avoided.

focus the strategic relevance of the times, his boss, whose appointment and vision thereof should have taken in the measure of the situation, reduced the implications to that of a petty individual requirement. Of such faux pas by the high and mighty is secession born!

Today if you go to Islamabad and aspire to get the attention of those who matter in between office routine, afternoon nap, golf, riding and/or tennis and before the usual evening reception (i.e. business as usual), the answer to your repeated entreaties to please focus on Karachi in supercession to everything else is, "shift your family to Islamabad!"

When you pester them repeatedly in the hope that maybe your persistence would break through their veneer of clam, the telephone operator (or bearer or whoever) has a repeated message for you, "Sahib has just left for a reception". If this was confined to one person one would dismiss it as an aberration, unfortunately the exasperation with the bearer of bad tidings about Karachi is universal in Islamabad.

While the country was burning in 1970-71, the leadership was out to an extended lunch, no wonder our world collapsed around us. Such is the irony of fate that when it did collapse, all those who had gone from pillar to post predicting dire straits unless remedial measures were taken, immediately became "traitors" for having stated the obvious.

Twenty five years later this is the same labelling for those who now dare to talk (and write) about growing Mohajir alienation from the Pakistan mainstream. The tragedy is that now almost

all except some myopic parochial diehards (with what goes for brains in their shoes), accept that gross mistakes across the whole spectrum were committed in the East Pakistan, dereliction of the norms of leadership and statecraft being directly responsible for the disaster.

It is easy to blame the PM Ms Benazir and the present PPP government for all of Pakistan's many problems, nobody seems to really enquire whether everything was hunky-dory for the past decade or so and do we really believe that any alternative to

party and its leader. Since neither major party got a clear mandate in the political compromise trade Ms Benazir has shown greater flexibility and alacrity. Aided with her substantial war chest the PM rules comfortably — and despite the odds, quite confidently.

However, her very success in political maneuvering exposes the system to be a farce, far from being representative of the genius and aspirations of the people. What else can one label a system that throws up people like Wattoo and Nakai and

Furthermore despite the fact that professionalism in the Army has been enhanced up the ladder, so has the debilitating effect of a sliding scale of perks, eroding the credibility that the uniform once enjoyed in the eyes of the common man.

The intelligentsia and masses are much more perceptive than they were two or three decades ago, they require self-accountability to be institutionalised before they can accept anyone's credibility, "let him cast the first stone, he who has not sinned!"

For those who have been associated in any manner with the military hierarchy, this perception leads to despondency when those who have been heroes and role models to us for many years, chose to remain silent in the face of the rapid slide of their country into anarchy (the only reasons one can appertain for their "discretion" are career, pension, plots and other perks thereof), one is forced to concede that the prevailing system has eroded the final frontiers of credibility.

Who will be ready to die for one's country if one is not ready to risk one's careers for one's beliefs and the integrity of the profession? When men of character and integrity are found to have feet of clay in not demanding accountability, it is useless and futile to expect their less scrupulous colleagues to show any inclination in reforming the system to suit the mass aspirations.

Bangladesh let a golden opportunity slip when Gen Ershad handed over power to a Caretaker Government. The Caretaker Government, done by political consensus was headed by the Chief Justice

of the Supreme Court and was composed of persons of integrity without any political leaning, above all they were acceptable to both the major parties. Moreover each individual member of the Caretaker Government had given an undertaking not to enter politics for several years after incumbency, the Chief Justice returning to his original post. The net result is that despite the free elections and restoration of democracy thereof, Bangladesh has come a full circle as the masses are again out in the streets paralyzing routine life and government. If the mandate of the Caretakers had been extended for a period of one to two years to include comprehensive electoral and administrative reform, the malady that is now afflicting the body-politic and causing recurring system failure could have been avoided.

We have an elected government in Pakistan and whatever its merits or demerits, it is firmly in power, strikes and black days notwithstanding. Let us first put the onus on the ruling party to effect lasting changes in the system for the good of the country while rising above narrow and petty party considerations.

This country is surviving on its momentum. The laws of physics dictate that this will diminish unless changes are made to its present state. Ms Benazir should not be like the wind which cannot read, she should seize this moment in history, enacting such changes that are logical and correct, either through the present coalition or even as the head of a national government.

The basics of good governance make it incumbent upon the rulers not to ignore such cries from the wilderness for avoiding the catastrophe that at least a majority of the citizens of this nation seem to feel is about to engulf this nation.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

the present regime would provide us the necessary relief in the future? Even if the Ms Benazir regime should fall, we will have more of the same.

What we have in Pakistan is a system-failure where drastic remedial action has become necessary. But who will have the courage to make the changes? In the words of Altaf Gauhar at a recent seminar in Karachi, "we are a sham democracy, hostage in the hands of feudals who have a motivated interest in persisting with the same system".

From the rural areas our elected representatives are almost all to a man (and some women) feudals who have opted time and again to change sides to cling to whoever is in power in Pakistan.

To the credit of some PPP stalwarts, feudal or not, a handful have always retained their steadfastness to their

makes a major party like PPP hostage to their whims and desires? For both Ms Benazir and Mian Nawaz Sharif it would have been far better to have either of their major political parties rule as a minority government rather than be subject to blackmail by what are essentially political mercenaries (Pol-Mercs).

Given that the system is a farce, who do we turn to effect changes that would conform to the logic of democracy and bring about economic emancipation of the masses. Each time that we have turned to the Army we have come off worse than we were because the military leaders, instead of focussing on the primary aim started to enjoy the trappings of power.

Like the IMF, the Army can only perform short term battlefield surgery, the longterm reforms can only be enacted by a truly representative government.

What Happens to the Institution of Deputy Commissioner?

It was held that the BCS(A) Deputy Commissioner should be replaced by an elected head of district administration, and that it was the latter who should supervise and coordinate all departments at that level, since the present arrangement smacked of "colonialism".

THE Deputy Commissioner's conspicuous role in administration has over the years turned him into an institution, but of late his position has been under heavy attack from certain quarters. One of the main points of contention is his role in coordination, particularly as head of the District Development Coordination Committee (DDCC), a position which automatically confers on him the status of first among equals. In fact, such committee meetings are now consistently boycotted, to the serious detriment of development work. The Deputy Commissioner's authority over law and order and magistracy, revenue and land matters, development activities, election administration, disaster management, protocol, etc. together with the general identification of his office as the chief point of contact between citizen and administration both by the central government and the common man are also not viewed with favour by the same group. In one word, if possible, they would like to see the age-old institution of Deputy Commissioner destroyed.

At one time, they argued that there was no need for coordination and supervision at all at this level, and that matters could be handled departmentally, that is through top-down vertical operations. However, they were quick to realize the holowness of this argument. Given the multi-sectoral nature of development activities, could field level coordination and supervision be avoided in real life if goods and services of certain minimum quality were to be de-

livered on time? What about emergency situations involving disaster management by many agencies? Later on, therefore, they came out with an alternative postulation. It was held that the BCS(A) Deputy Commissioner should be replaced by an elected head of district administration, and that it was the latter who should supervise and coordinate all departments at that level, since the present arrangement smacked of "colonialism". The problems with the latest argument are several. First, in a multi-party democracy, given that elections would inevitably lead to different parties winning in different districts, how would the will of the central government be exercised? Second, could a partisan head of the district administration neutrally handle the more sensitive components of his responsibilities such as law and order, election administration, etc? If not, why invite chaos? Third, at the present level of our political development, would not such an administration become thoroughly politicized on narrow party political lines, bringing in more dissension than unity in its wake? Fourth, would not the sitting MP come in direct clash with such an elected head of district administration? When the MP, irrespective of political affiliation, could not tolerate an UZP Chairman, how comfortable would he/she feel in his/her constituency when a directly elected head of District, voted to power perhaps by four times the

number of voters who elected the MP, hovers over his/her head? Fifth, could Bangladesh financially afford direct elections for head of the district administration at the present moment? If direct elections could be afforded, why is it that the Zila Parishad Bill is still in a limbo? Finally, how is it that India, which is the largest democracy in the world, has not dismantled the Deputy Commissioner-centred field administration system even after fifty years of independent and demo-

cratic rule? In fact, to my knowledge, there is not a single ex-British colony in the world where the head of district administration is at present elected. What has, of course, happened is that many development functions have been transferred to the elected local government body at that level, but even there the Deputy Commissioner has been accorded a prominent role.

So, it would clearly appear that there is hardly any substance in the second line of argument either. However, the matter still deserves further probing and consideration. This is because if there is no apparent rational behind this demand and one has to ask, what is the hidden agenda which keeps it

alive for such a long time. It seems that there could be either of the following two concealed reasons: (a) other departmental heads at the district level would like to have a free for all, and that is possible only if the Deputy Commissioner's position can be demolished or further weakened; and (b) members of the specialist and functional services would themselves like to be Deputy Commissioners because they genuinely feel that the present generation of Deputy

Commissioners should also be allowed to hold an equivalent number of posts at that level generally reserved for officers of the non BCS(A) cadres. Such posts could easily be identified, particularly in the functional services (i.e. leaving aside hardcore medical, engineering and agricultural posts).

All other officers at the district level should be from the same service and of the same seniority at present. This would ensure minimum dislocation to the existing structure, besides providing the proposed Deputy Commissioner with a clear edge over other district level officers in terms of rank, pay, seniority and status. This, in turn, would provide him with a natural authority to coordinate and supervise the work of all district level officers.

Making Government Work

by Analyst

Commissioners does not have the intellectual/management capability to coordinate and supervise them. On the other hand, they could easily man these jobs despite their cadre disadvantage. Corrupt and inefficient segments among the specialists are most likely to be motivated by the first line of thinking and hence it should not be heeded to. On the other hand, the bright, honest and capable among the specialists are likely to be guided by the second line of argument. Obviously, the latter position cannot be so easily dismissed because it is true that on a comparative scale, the younger lot among the specialists and functional cadre officers are perhaps intellectually no less, if not better

than those from BCS(A) cadre who are or will in future be Deputy Commissioners from BCS(A) cadre. This state of affairs is likely to continue for quite some time, given that quality of intake to BCS(A) in the first few years of independence was below the normal standard, and later on also, not necessarily the best among the successful BCS examinees opted for BCS(A). In other words, there is some rationale for at least partial opening up of the post of Deputy Commissioner to services other than BCS (A). But, if at all, this should be operationalised in a least hurting manner. In my opinion, this is how this task may be accomplished:

• The Senior Service Pool (as suggested in an earlier write-up) should consist of officers not below the rank of Joint Secretary (JS) to be recruited through open competition from among not only Deputy Secretaries (DS) but also officials of other cadres and corporations and non-government professionals fulfilling some clearly specified criteria.

• The junior-most among the JS should be considered for posting as Deputy Commissioners. At least 25 per cent and a maximum of 50 per cent of the DCs should be JS without BCS(A) background. Such JSs should be first given a crash course in certain subjects before being sent out as Deputy Commissioners.

• Reciprocally, JS with

The elected thana Parishad should be revived, and leaving aside some retained subjects of sensitive nature, all other government functions should be brought under its purview. The TNO from the BCS(A) cadre, as in the past, should be made the Chief Executive Officer of the Thana Parishad. When the fully elected Thana Parishad is firmly established as an institution, parliamentary democracy takes root and elections can be made less expensive both to the government as well as individual contestants, then and only then may the question of having an elected head of district administration be seriously considered. Until then, a via media as suggested above seems to be the only way out. As they say our aim should always be for the art of the possible.

Commentary: Putting Bangladesh First

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allowed to fail.

This prompts us to underscore, with all the sincerity at our command, that PM's letter will have to be drafted on a realistic assessment of the political developments of the past four and half years, and especially of the last 18 months. It has to be drafted with the welfare of Bangladesh, its people and its democracy in mind. And not on considerations of ego, party, or face. Yes, politicians, will have to think of the party, its image, and of themselves. Yet we have had many politicians who put the country above everything else. Politicians become statesmen (and women) when they do so. Time has come for to put BANGLADESH FIRST.

So what needs to be done at this stage? Here are some suggestions.

First, as we had said earlier BOTH SIDES MUST BE REALISTIC. The realism will have to be based on the political lessons of the last four years, and especially of the last 18 months. The most important lesson is that neither side has won the public totally to its side. What we have today is a divided nation. As we have said so often earlier, there is significant support for the idea of a neutral body to be in power just prior to, and during the next elections. In fact support for this idea has grown over time, and can now be said to enjoy near universal backing among the general voters. Significantly, if people are given an option to have a neutral government for the elections, within the framework of the constitution, we feel that most voters will prefer that option to anything else. If the fundamental demands of both

sides — neutral government (opposition), formulated within the framework of the constitution (ruling party) can be accommodated within one formula, THEN WHY SHOULDN'T BOTH SIDES AGREE? We the people must let both sides know that when their respective positions are being accommodated, then they will have to agree. THIS OUR DEMAND. We have heard enough about their demands. Now political groups must listen to the PEOPLES DEMAND. We want a negotiated, and mutually honourable solution to this crisis.

Second, the opposition's formula of post-facto ratification is fraught with danger. The idea is that four parties (BNP, AL, JP and Jamaat) will take some unified actions NOW, which fall outside the present constitution, and will have all such acts ratified in

the next parliament. Given the history of quarrel, deep mistrust, and mutual vilification of all these parties, it is foolhardy to believe that these parties will live upto their commitment once election results are out. We feel convinced that the parties which will lose, or get seats far less than expected, will at once decry the elections. More to the point, Supreme Court will reject any such move, moment anybody goes to court.

So as a people, we cannot subject the future of our constitution on promises of parties who have broken so many of them in the past. (Recall BNP's refusal to implement the "Agreement of the Three Alliances", after the elections of '91).

Third, the question of Chief Justice heading a caretaker government has the possibility of politicising the judiciary. Case of Justice Shahabuddin has to be judged

in the background of the fall of autocracy and the need for an immediate solution to a rapidly evolving political situation. Even there, it was well within the framework of the Presidential form of the constitution, existing at that time.

Fourth, BNP's recent position that another BNP leader will head the government when Begum Zia steps down for 30 days, is in total contradiction to the impression that we have had so far. Yes, technically BNP never spelt out who will head the government when PM resigns, but in the same vein we can say, that the ruling party never said that it will be another partyman (or woman) who will head the government during those crucial 30 days. In fact if BNP had done so, then may be the opposition would never have taken this offer seriously. No, raising this point now is essentially taking back by the left

hand, what was offered by the right. We strongly feel that it is against the letter and spirit of the PM's offer of resignation made on 29th of December '94, and repeated on several occasions subsequently.

As we have said earlier, the answer lies in collectively choosing a set of neutral people and getting them into the parliament through the bye-election route. Let the constitutional experts work out the details. But this can be done only after the two sides agree. This provides the only possible solution before the nation at the moment, which accommodates the fundamental demands of the two sides.

We most sincerely and humbly urge the Prime Minister to seriously consider the political situation in a calm and dispassionate manner before finalising her letter. The situation calls for her to put BANGLADESH FIRST.