

For Fair Comments

In her address to the public meeting at Chittagong Lalidighi Maidan in Chittagong, former leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina has made two serious allegations against the erstwhile BNP government: (a) it had appointed partymen in the administrative service, and (b) during the BNP rule the home ministry issued as many as 20,000 arms licences to people of its choice. Hasina demands removal of the aforementioned officials to ensure success of the drive against illegal arms in the country.

We not only understand but also share Hasina's concern for the arms recovery. However, what is not so clear to us is the relation between the alleged party appointments and the arms recovery. This point needs to be clarified. Did the BNP make those appointments in breach of the Public Service Commission rules? Was the partisan recruitment true for a particular batch, or for several batches? If so which years were those recruitment made? It should be very much possible to identify such cases of misfeasance and the PSC can be asked for an explanation.

More to the point should be the alleged partisan approach in issuing licences of firearms. If this has happened, it is easier to detect and the culprits punished. We are talking about something which is a matter of record. If 20,000 arms licences were issued along the party line, the whole process ought to be brought out into the open. Its possible adverse influence on the election process cannot be taken lightly. Let there be an impartial investigative report on the matter to clear the air. The chief adviser himself should take up the issue because without sorting out such a thing it will be difficult for his administration to conduct the polls freely and fairly.

Meanwhile, we plead with both Khaleda and Hasina to avoid making comments that might muddy the water further, rather than help to move us forward. This will not help either their cause or the cause of the country's politics in general.

Momentum for the ADP

The dismal performance in the ADP implementation cannot be wholly attributed to a long drawn-out political crisis, however handy it may be to point all our failures in that direction. In fact one suspects that on top of the known snags in handling development projects, a certain precipitate attitude of resignation had set in prior to the advent of the caretaker government.

The noticeable thing is that it is during a relatively calmer political period between July, 1995 and January, 1996 that more than 50 per cent of the ADP projects had made no progress in physical or expenditure terms.

Of the total number of 1085 projects making up the ADP for 1995-96, 509 were reliant on foreign aid and 576 were to be domestically funded.

One cannot easily appreciate why aid disbursement should have been so badly affected by the local political commotion. At any rate, we surely could have given a better account of ourselves so far as the locally-funded projects went!

The details make even a worse reading. When we were seven months into the ADP, as many as 238 projects remained unapproved out of 322 that had been incorporated in the ADP but without any formal approval of the ECNEC. Why such foot-dragging and indolence about mandatory paperwork?

It appears also that monthly evaluation meetings were not held regularly by the ministries and divisions to pinpoint reasons behind any slowdown in the project implementation and take timely corrective measures thereon. Only 13 out of the 48 ministries and divisions having projects to implement ever cared to hold any evaluation meeting.

The 50 high priority projects, taking up more than one third of the ADP outlay, seem to be in a dire strait!

Only three months are left of the 1995-1996 fiscal year. With the foreign aid disbursements hopefully resuming sooner than later and the internal resource back-up strengthened in good time, the ADP implementation should pick up in a compensatory fashion.

Healthy Cities

The World Health Day which falls today is being dedicated to "Healthy Cities For Better Life". This is a goal, a concern and a theme of utmost importance for the future of humankind. At least 50 per cent of the global population would make cities their homes by the turn of the century risking their very existence to an array of health and environmental hazards.

Basically it is a process rather than a one-time goal that is sought to be introduced by the World Health Organisation. The process at this stage seems modelled on seven 'success cities' of which our Cox's Bazar is one. The township of 65,000 people has crafted a 'healthy city plan'.

Our success in the Expanded Programme of Immunisation, though already a catch-word for other developing countries, has to be lived up here and elsewhere as well for the sake of the teeming new borns.

But we hear the footsteps of a problem of diminishing intelligence due to declining levels of nutrition, something which needs to be addressed at the soonest to stave off a national disaster looming on the horizon.

The WHO and other relevant organisations of the UN stand committed to carrying forward the 'healthy cities' programmes. They now need the inputs of coalitions to be formed by the local self-government institutions, NGOs and community associations in the countries of their concern. Let us provide these to them with the city corporations and the media playing a complementary role in the process.

Where Do We Go from Here? — Some Reflections

Sheikh Hasina has clearly and categorically declared that no one including her own party men should be spared from the arms recovery drive. Begum Zia refused to make any such statement.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah A M S Kibria



ago was arrested only after the fall of the BNP government. Who gave him protection all these years? So long as this situation persists, neither the candidates nor their workers and volunteers will feel secure;

certainly the voters will not feel safe.

An environment free from the threat of violence is an essential pre-requisite for elections that are genuinely free. It is no secret that during

Secretaries' Rebellion against an Elected and Lawful Government

by Oli Ahad

THE standard norm in a democracy is that elected and lawful government will come for a term, stay in office or go depending on the mandate of the electorate. But the bureaucracy will remain self-effacing, be apolitical and provide the 'steel stream' of continuity and governance both in peace and war. They will carry out the routine administration, as per rules, give alternative policy option and spell out their implications, including the bureaucratic ones. They will then faithfully carry out the policy decisions and orders to the best of their ability. In this process of governance the government takes over the steering, while the bureaucracy takes the back seat and is never seen or heard in public. Hence, bureaucracy keeps serving as per rules irrespective of who ever enters or leaves the Prime Minister's office after periodic election.

The bureaucracy in Bangladesh has been following this tradition until very recently. Its actions in public since the end of March 1996, in sharp departure from the traditional norm. This unprecedented and unheard of step by 35 Secretaries — the pivot/nerve centre of the Civil Administration in contravention of the Government Servants Conduct Rules 1979 is nothing but the Grammar of Anarchy" in the language of the Architect of the Constitution of the Republic of India — Dr B R Ambedkar. 1990 Cabinet Secretary and others, did the same, no action was taken by the then Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed and this time Madam Prime Minister failed to take action pending proceedings drawn.

Purpose: The purpose of the paper is to maintain that:

i) The actions of the bureaucracy, specially the secretaries were in contravention of the government servants conduct rules, 1979.

ii) A dangerous precedent has been set-up for which the nation may continue to heavily pay and.

iii) seek clarification from the secretaries for their recent conduct.

Govt. Servants Conduct Rules 1979: The rules, inter alia provides that:

i) No government servant shall in public utterance make any statement of opinion, which is capable of embarrassing the relations between the government and the people or any section thereof or

ii) No government servant shall take part in, subscribe to or assist in anyway any political movement in Bangladesh or relating to the affairs of Bangladesh.

Government servant apolitical role since 1971: The apolitical orientation of bureaucracy in the tradition of that in England, in the absence of any substantiated evidence to the contrary explains why and how they could have served in different capacities in a self-effacing manner under, viz.

i) A presidential form of government and then a parliamentary form of govt.

ii) One-party presidential form of government.

iii) Two martial law regimes.

iv) A presidential form of government.

v) A caretaker government, composed of non-elected persons.

vi) An elected government of parliamentary Westminster model from 1991, 30th March 1996, and

vii) Now serving again under a non-elected caretaker government since 31 March 1996.

This is remarkable if not necessarily commendable. The members of bureaucracy kept to themselves their opinion if they suffered any agony, any prick of conscience or the reverse, they did not demonstrate their reaction and opinion in public not to speak of addressing a merry crowd of any particular political dais or platform. This was in the best tradition of the British bureaucracy and in conformity with

the government servant conduct rules, 1979.

iv) Openly sided with certain political parties, who are aspiring to be in power.

v) Demolished centuries old traditions of being apolitical as public servants.

vi) Made them vulnerable of being obliged to resign or held hostage by their subordinate staff.

vii) Consciously or unconsciously played into the "invisible hands" which have definite interest to keep Bangladesh destabilised and stagnant, and

ix) Jeopardised the impartiality of the forthcoming general election.

Request for a clarification: Hence, it is possibly difficult to resist the inquisitive human nature to seek clarifications from them on besides others, certain select queries. What they have in their defence if they were asked, that by their conduct, they:

i) Subverted the sovereignty of the people, who are the supreme source of all power (Art. 7 of our Constitution).

ii) Further exceeded the concept of rule of legal law.

iii) Pronounced extra judicial verdict regarding the legality or otherwise of the last

government servant conduct rules, 1979, and thus committed contempt of legal law.

iv) Acted in violation of the government servant rules 1979.

v) Openly sided with certain political parties, who are aspiring to be in power.

vi) Demolished centuries old traditions of being apolitical as public servants.

vii) Made them vulnerable of being obliged to resign or held hostage by their subordinate staff.

viii) Consciously or unconsciously played into the "invisible hands" which have definite interest to keep Bangladesh destabilised and stagnant, and

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"Be you ever so high the law is above you": One would expect the secretaries and leaders of various employees associations to publicly clarify these queries, if they are unable or unwilling to do so:

ii) It would be too much for them either publicly repent and apologise or resign of their own or

iii) for the caretaker government which is headed by a retired chief justice of Bangladesh to initiate the process of taking necessary disciplinary action and re-establish his own commitment to Rule of Legal Law in Bangladesh in the interest of public service. Here is an acid test for him.

I have seen the *Press Report* of the address by the Hon'ble Chief Advisor to the secretaries and others on 24.9.6. I feel encouraged to take the liberty to draw Justice Habibur Rahman's attention to the maxim "Be you ever so high the law is above you." That is what is being accepted in recent judicial activism by the Supreme Court of India. I fervently hope that Hon'ble Justice Rahman will not fail the country.

The writer is a veteran politician and the President of Democratic League.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Civil servants

Sir, Woe be to the civil servants, especially the 35 senior secretaries who abdicated their responsibilities and joined the opposition bandwagon. As soon as the whiff of change tickled their bureaucratic nostrils, they caught the virus of boycott and stayed at home instead of performing their duties within the secretariat. It is a reflection on the quality of our civil servants who are a far cry from their counterparts in India and England.

The legacy of neutrality, dignity, and dedication which marked the bureaucrats of yesteryear has been totally demolished. What remains now is a tradition of sycophancy, partisanship, opportunism and corruption. The future of Bangladesh is bleak indeed, thanks to the recent precedent set by our senior secretaries!

Hasina Zaman
Dhaka

Pakistani atrocities in 1971

Sir, My congratulations to the women of Bangladesh for filing charges against the government of Pakistan for atrocities committed by the Pakistani armed forces in 1971, in Bangladesh. And my congratulations to the business community for moral support to the women and looking to seek compensation from the Pakistani government for monetary losses incurred by the Bangladesh businesses in 1971.

The officers responsible for the most horrendous genocide in the world after Nazi Germany are today given shelter and 'dignity' by the government of Pakistan. Gen Niazi walks in the Defence Polo Grounds in Lahore, every evening, to keep 'healthy'. Gen Gilani was made the Governor of Punjab, after his return from

the killing fields of Bangladesh. Army officers, both retired and serving, boast in the Punjab Club in Lahore, of their 'conquests' in Bangladesh and openly admit committing atrocities there.

And there is a sense of shock and outrage in Pakistan, at Bangladesh daring to bring charges against the 'martial race' — the 'martial race' which is only good at killing unarmed men, women and children.

The International War Crimes Tribunal should come forward as they have in Bosnia, to apprehend and try the war criminals whom Pakistan sheltered, so that no nation can again be subjected to such atrocities as that unleashed by the Pakistani Army in Bangladesh.

My advice and request to Sigma Huda, Salma Ali, Khushi Kabir, all the other women activists and the business community in Bangladesh, keep up the good work. We are proud of you.

A concerned citizen
Lahore, Pakistan

Women's representation

Sir, We appreciate the Chief Adviser's decision to appoint a woman adviser to his team of advisers. We congratulate Dr Najma Chowdhury and of course the other advisers on their appointment.

The elections are going to be held in May or June and the political parties will give nominations to their members. We would like to request the major political parties that in keeping with global acknowledgement of women's contributions and for upholding their commitment to Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, to nominate women.

To try and achieve wider representation and to be both inclusive and gender balanced

we request the parties to nominate at least thirty per cent women candidates. Women have been contributing in political movements as well as strengthening political parties. If women have the leadership qualities and their performance justify nomination then why not nominate them?

Democracy, participation and good governance require the involvement, representation and participation of fifty per cent of the population, fifty per cent of the constituents: fifty per cent of the electorate.

We are sure that party leadership have identified the potential women leaders in their parties. However, if they are interested to solicit suggestions from extra-party sources then the numerous women organisations and non-governmental organisations can be of some assistance.

The democratic country with 'transformational' politics that the political parties are striving for will not be achieved without gender representation and gender balance in the political system and party. Let us all work to develop a new political culture in Bangladesh.

Farah Kabir
Lalmata, Dhaka

Star TV's decision

Sir, We are awfully dismayed at STAR TV network's decision to take off the BBC World TV channel from its network, only to be replaced by another Indian channel which has little but stale Hindisong programmes and fickle dramas. Just how much more 'hip-wriggling' can one take? As one of the most reliable, neutral news channels in the world, the people of South Asia and the Middle East — being already starved of impartial news service in their own countries — would fall back on BBC for information and now even that is being denied.

Apart from news, BBC documentaries and entertainment programmes were undoubtedly one of the best in the network and proved extremely educational too.

The new position of their satellite makes it difficult for dish-owners to change their positions for a single channel which would mean losing others as well. So it would be

highly appreciated if BTV would replace the CNN timings with BBC and revest back to their old afternoon routine — that of telecasting BBC from 2 pm to 4 pm. CNN will hardly be missed by the viewers; who's interested in Jesse Jackson and CNN-available hotels' anyway? CNN has little news about South Asia in the hour that they're shown, whereas, BBC has an hourly Asia Today service from 7 am to 10 am. As for the afternoon timings, I'm sure most would prefer watching new BBC programmes than reruns of BTV's ancient programmes.

We hope, BTV would earnestly consider this request.

Ayesha Farzana
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Dhanmondi/R/A,
Dhaka-1209

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