

## Be Change-friendly

These are glaring examples of making a last stand to upset the apple cart. Take the case of Saidabad Water Treatment Plant still hanging fire as more than half the total number of city dwellers go without potable water. Also be introduced to the dispute currently raging between the Chittagong port authorities and the employees' union over an attempted use of four straddle carriers hired from private parties to expedite the handling of cargo under exceptional circumstances.

The crucial IDA credit for the vital Saidabad Water Treatment Plant is all but lined up except for the fulfilment of a World Bank requirement that collection of bills in two WASA zones be contracted out to private hands. Unscrupulous trade union leaders have opposed this tooth and nail seemingly for no better reason than the end of the party it signals for the 'huge pilferage' that has gone on. We would not have taken such a cynical view if the leaders by now — under pressure as they were — had succeeded in effecting a reasonable cut-back on the system loss estimated to be of the highly indefensible order of 52 per cent.

With the World Bank's project approval meet rescheduled for April 24, the fate of Saidabad plant, as it boils down now, hinges on meeting the WASA workers' condition that they be given pension in lieu of leasing out bill collection to private parties. This is not to make a short shrift of their concern for economic security and rehabilitation but to pinpoint the attitude of the workers' unions to resist change and innovation which in the ultimate analysis could be doing them a lot of collective good. When they know that privatisation and free market dynamics are unstoppable why should they take so much time to adjust with these especially as a safety net is being thrown in?

The Chittagong port's equipment inadequacy is well-known. If under extra-ordinary circumstances the port authority had hired the four straddle carriers from private parties to expedite cargo-handling in addition to operating those they themselves own, where is their fault? It will take the port authorities some time before they can import new straddle carriers. So why obstruct work now by forcing the hired carriers to remain idle?

## Alternative Energy

The country's search for alternative energy sources, appears to be making some headway. Harnessing wind power in the coastal areas for generation of electricity may no longer be a day-dream. Scientists are quite optimistic about production of 2000 mw on a commercial basis. As part of ground-work an experimental turbine will soon be installed at the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission head office next month. The wind speed monitored for the last three years has given encouraging results. The other good news is that quite a number of foreign countries have shown interest to invest in the sector.

Production of energy from renewable sources like the wind and sun rays is as yet more costly than that from conventional sources. But as the world's conventional sources are fast depleting, man must opt for wind and solar power. In this country both wind and sun — particularly the latter — are in abundance. If appropriate technology can be developed, commercial production of energy at a low cost will bring about a whole range of benefits for countries like ours. Working scientists have expressed optimism that production of power from wind will be commercially viable. Let's hope it is so.

If the wind power is more of a localised phenomenon — as in the coastal areas — sunshine is abundant all over the country and hence generation of solar energy in particular merits greater attention. The Grameen Bank has already been thinking along this line. It has contacted the repositories of knowledge about solar power generation in different countries. We suggest that a national think-tank comprising a committee of scientists and people from relevant ministries and institutes be formed to give a determined thrust on the development of alternative sources of energy.

## It's a Wrong Way

The police while serving eviction notices in the Dukhiyabari on the western side of the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge site, came under attack from local inhabitants. The villagers alleged that the JMB authorities were up to evicting them without adequate compensation. We do not know how much is adequate. What, however, can be inferred from the wording of their allegation is that they have received some compensation all right.

If the villagers thought the compensation money was inadequate, why did they receive it in the first place? To attack the law enforcing agency is to violate the law and take it into their own hands. That is not the way: any grievance against compensation could be lawfully brought to the authorities' notice. This could be in the form of a representation before the authorities proper or a complaint field in the court.

There have been reports of irregularities concerning the payment of compensation: inhabitants of some other villages received compensation unlawfully as middlemen deprived genuine claimants of the same. Now here is an allegation of wrong-doing that must be gone into. We do not want to blame anyone straight-away. But we surely want to see the whole process of compensation made transparent. An enquiry committee should be constituted to look into the matter and address all the problems concerning displacement and compensation.

# The Present Administration Aim Deep, and Not Wide

## The Third View

by Mahfuz Anam

THE task before the caretaker government is immense. Following on such a prolonged and all-encompassing movement which involved severely straining the economy to its very limits, it is only natural that every ministry, every department and every office are in urgent need for attention and direction. Even in normal circumstances any government, of whatever duration, would find a thousand things to do.

But this is precisely the temptation that Mohammed Habibur Rahman's government must guard against. It is our considered opinion that the present government must aim deep and not wide — meaning that it must not try to do everything or address every issue or answer every question. On the other hand it should carefully select some priority areas and do as good a job that can be done under the circumstances.

The members of the caretaker cabinet are all doers. In fact they have been chosen because of their excellent track record in one field or another. By their nature the doers want to do things, rather than talk theories or enunciate grandiose plans. And because they have no electorate to either please or pander to, they have nothing to make them look over their shoulders. Their attitude of getting on with the work at hand is second nature to them. It is only

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natural that each of the advisers would try to get to the bottom of the problems of the respective ministries they have been put in charge of, and want to solve as many of the problems as they humanly can.

On the face of it, this is precisely the type of government we want and need — a government that gets into the nitty-gritty of the problem at hand, and gets on with the job with the best interest of the country, in contrast to that of a specific electorate, in mind. Because such an agenda looks so good on the surface, and because all sorts of interest logic and need would pull this government in different directions, that we think that a timely warning is in place. The very fact that we are writing this piece begs the question as to whether or not the caretaker government is already guilty of trying to do too much? We think not, at least not yet. And that is why the warning.

It is our view that this caretaker government should have only the following three tasks: a) Improve law and order; b) getting the economy moving again; c) hold free and fair election. Already an excellent start has been made by the appointment of Mr. Abu Henas as the Chief Election Commissioner. Mr. Habibur Rahman's decision to move out of judiciary and choose, for the first time in our history, a former bureaucrat as CEC speaks volumes of his courage (for it does take guts to do something new) and determination to get the best people for the right jobs. Appointment of Mr. Faizur Razzak as a full time secretary of the EC also creates a feeling of confidence about the functioning of EC.

As for law and order the first priority, as has already been taken up by the caretaker government, should be to rid the campuses of all armed hooligans. The newspaper reports of what arms recovery attempts are netting is something of a joke. It is not even

economic and production losses would have been worth it.

About getting the economy moving, there is only so much that this government can do. Again a careful prioritising can make the government's task achievable. For most of the economy the target should be to restore reasonable normalcy, like in banking, transport, communication, etc. In the export sector special attention and help should be given. And for the garments industry perhaps a special cell could be created to respond to their urgent needs. As our highest foreign currency earner the garments industry deserves our most concerted and effective assistance.

Raison d'être of the caretaker government is of course holding a free and fair election. This task must, as of necessity, get the most critical attention of this government. Already an excellent start has been made by the appointment of Mr. Abu Henas as the Chief Election Commissioner. Mr. Habibur Rahman's decision to move out of judiciary and choose, for the first time in our history, a former bureaucrat as CEC speaks volumes of his courage (for it does take guts to do something new) and determination to get the best people for the right jobs. Appointment of Mr. Faizur Razzak as a full time secretary of the EC also creates a feeling of confidence about the functioning of EC.

There are two important tasks that must be accomplished by Mr. Habibur Rahman's government before the polls can be held. First is to establish a code of conduct for all political parties and candidates to cover the campaign and the days of the election. Second is to set up norms for transparency in election fi-

caretaker government should go deep and not wide. The basic message is that it should not spread itself too thin in picking up challenges it has neither the time nor the resources to tackle. In the foregoing section we had tried to identify the three areas where it should concentrate its attention. Law and order, reviving the economy and holding a free and fair elections are by themselves formidable tasks.

Newspaper reports have it that steps are being taken to restore the morale of the administration and the police. Here again the attempt of this government should be focused on strengthening the institutions and giving play to the well laid out procedures which have been built up through years of practice and experience.

It is the tendency of political governments to subvert and short circuit procedures in order to reward the 'loyal' and the 'believers' that bring down administrative efficiency and morale.

So far, we give full marks for the prudence, creativity, and, in the cause of the EC, boldness with which Mr. Habibur Rahman and his cabinet have moved.

For a group of people who did not ask for this job — far from asking, it was thrust on them — much too much depends on their success. Conversely, disastrous consequences await this nation if they fail. It is thus, from an acute awareness of the need for them to succeed, and the danger we face if they fail, that we suggest the aforementioned limited agenda. There is too much at stake.

This government must succeed, for our sake. And hence it should aim deep and not wide.

## To the Editor...

### Sad picture of politics and officialdom

Sir, So right from the first day of peace and tranquillity in the country, perhaps the real picture of a bureaucrat has surfaced. Discrimination in the Cabinet Division has been detected. As Mr. Rashed Khan Menon stated 'the bureaucracy has visibly shown their inclination to certain political quarters' in inviting political lead-

ers. However, all political parties should now work in harmony as never will they work united. And the NPCG should strive to establish 'rule of law'. By the way, it should also caution all concerned to stop issuing notices of various nature of '24 hrs', '48 hrs' etc which itself is farcical as none obeyed so far. I would like to mention here that we all now have a great role to play in this valuable hour of the nation. We should not waste time but put forward constructive and welfare ideas for the good of the nation.

Every party chalks out programmes of agitation or jubilation in the name of the people, but mind it, people do no more want to see in the news 'BCL exchanges fire with JCD' or 'JCD with BCL' and '2 killed, 10 hurt', etc. I appreciate and hail Dr. Kamal Hossain for his clarion call of the day 'to abolish armed cadres' by all political parties. Every party must observe restraint and must stop hurling abusive words. They will do real good for themselves if instead of retaliatory speeches in the streets they get down to their work of electioneering and educating the public.

The Chief Advisor of the NPCG sought cooperation of all irrespective of their party affiliation and opinion for discharging his great responsibility and he hoped that workers of the parties would respond to the call of their leaders for 'calm' and 'cooperation' to auger well not only for their parties but for the whole nation. He should also not hesitate to caution the political parties/leaders that, if he finds any time, any one crossing lines or the limit that may jeopardise peace, tranquillity and endanger security and

sovereignty of the country, he/she will be severely dealt with.

A F Rahman  
Dhaka

### Where do we go from here...

Sir, I like to draw your kind attention to the article 'Where do we go from here? — Some reflections' by Mr. Shah A. M. S. Kibria in your daily of 7th April 96. Mr. Kibria is a person of international repute and surely he is a national asset. His article written primarily on arms recovery drive is quite timely no doubt. However, I must say that his article more or less reflects his own idea of BNP bashing, and all praise for Awami League chief. Those who have observed Awami League activities for last two decades or more shall always have apprehension about Awami League. We general public are quite aware that all major political parties have armed followers or cadres ready to put up a fight at any time anywhere. It is, therefore, futile to express high praise for one party and whip the others. Mr. Kibria has every right to be a member of Awami League but I do not consider his partisan advocacy would reflect himself as a person of very high standing. We need persons like Mr. Kibria to the best interest of the nation and not only for a particular party. I would request Mr. Kibria to go through the article published in the Ittefaq of the same day (7th April) written by Mr. Mainul Hossain. He will surely understand where the problem lies.

Nurul Basher  
Khulgaon, Dhaka

# Caretaker Government: Practice and Precept

by M M Rezaul Karim

THE present caretaker government in Bangladesh has been constituted with a definite mandate to undertake restrictive functions and has limited time to accomplish its task. The mandate is to a free, fair and impartial election: the restrictive functions relate to those governmental activities which have direct bearing on the conduct of the parliamentary election as well as routine functions for the rest; and the time is limited to the period needed for handing over power to the next elected government.

The selection of members of the Council of Advisors appears to be satisfactory and acceptable to all. The members admirably conform to the two starling qualities required of the Council members to perform their task diligently — skill and impartiality, though may not be in the same order. The members represent various trade and profession and bring with them storehouse of knowledge, varied experience and the much needed dedication to the cause. Needless to say, the political parties would have been happier still had their lists of suggestion been accepted in toto. But this was not to be so. The selection no doubt testifies to the sagacious

These definitely ran counter to the general interests of the people. The opposition retorts that no such damages would have caused had the ruling party accepted their demand earlier. The ruling party defended by saying that the resignation of opposition MPs from the parliament closed all doors to solving this issue in accordance with law and constitution. The arguments may continue and have done so indeed.

People now tend to ask themselves a vital and glaring question — why not the politicians settle their internecine disputes by purely political means and not by those which take away a chunk of livelihood of the ordinary people and compound their misery and deprivation?

One may not even stop at that. The government should mete out exemplary punishment to those who are found guilty of such heinous crimes to the society that its rigour may act as effective deterrent in future. Furthermore, such measures are not necessary merely for the purpose of ensuring a peaceful election but, due to growing and unfortunate involvement of the student community in these despicable criminal activities, stern measures are both justified and welcome for saving the soul and body of our future generation.

The resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner, Justice Sadeque, relieved plenty

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judgement that one generally attributes to the venerable head of country's judiciary in the immediate past.

The tasks lying ahead of the Council are arduous, exhaustive and pose a well-nigh challenge to its members. The limited size of the Council has circumscribed its physical ability and imposed heavy responsibility on their shoulders, despite putting issues relating to policy matters technically out of their purview.

Among the immediate imperatives of the Council is to restore law and order in the country and to create a peaceful but healthy competitive atmosphere congenial for holding a free and fair elections are by themselves formidable tasks.

Newspaper reports have it that steps are being taken to restore the morale of the administration and the police. Here again the attempt of this government should be focused on strengthening the institutions and giving play to the well laid out procedures which have been built up through years of practice and experience.

It is the tendency of political governments to subvert and short circuit procedures in order to reward the 'loyal' and the 'believers' that bring down administrative efficiency and morale.

So far, we give full marks for the prudence, creativity, and, in the cause of the EC, boldness with which Mr. Habibur Rahman and his cabinet have moved.

For a group of people who did not ask for this job — far from asking, it was thrust on them — much too much depends on their success. Conversely, disastrous consequences await this nation if they fail. It is thus, from an acute awareness of the need for them to succeed, and the danger we face if they fail, that we suggest the aforementioned limited agenda. There is too much at stake.

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of people who were getting impatient and apprehensive due to delay. By resigning of his own volition his constitutional post carrying a fixed tenure of five years, he made his exit with respect and grace and, strange may it seem to us, made some contribution to the easing out of current political situation in the country. Otherwise, the process would have been complex and could take long. Justice Sadeque did well by acting this way, since he realised that in the face of opposition from a significant section of people, the CEC loses the moral authority to carry out his onerous and impartial task.

The appointment of Mr. Abu Henas as the new CEC following extensive search and consultation, has been widely welcomed and acceptable to all. Let us hope the political parties give him genuine cooperation as pledged and help him accomplish his task well.

The issue of mending the tattered economy also calls for immediate attention of the present government. The colossal damages caused to the economy by way of loss of production and dislocation in distribution, reduction in income and employment, fall in exports and foreign investments, and erosion of confidence among our overseas partners in progress are simply staggering and appear irreparable in the immediate future. The social costs in the fields of education, health, welfare, etc are also enormous. All these amounted to the immediate and consequent misery and distress of the general public, over a brief period such as this, of the scale hitherto unparalleled in the entire history of our land.

All these resulted from the forced hartals, siege, non-cooperation and such measures called and effected by the opposition political parties.

The above is indeed an outburst of a feeling of genuine frustration than an expose of sound and altruistic conviction.

What does a non-partisan caretaker government really signify? It signifies a stark reality that negates the very essence of democracy: establishment of the rule of the people and the right of governance by the will of the governed. Our politicians belonging to the erstwhile opposition, as public representatives, have not allowed fellow politicians, also public representatives, to continue to govern during the transition period of a multi-party general election. Instead, they demanded, as a substitute, a non-elective and unrepresentative, though a highly distinguished, non-partisan caretaker government.

Does not this imply that, due to deep distrust of one another and for some other reasons, politicians consider that a group of non-political persons can be more trusted to govern and can deliver goods which politicians are unable to do? The question may then arise in one's mind if such a trusted, efficient and perhaps honest group of apolitical gentry can enjoy confidence of all politicians and are able to govern the nation satisfactorily, though for a brief period, why should not the same group be allowed to govern the country for a longer period? At least for the period till we season ourselves as mature and trusted politicians capable to playing our legitimate role. The answer is not so easy to find.

Now that we will have our elections under NCG, let us hope that there will be no more agitation for change of government like in the past. Standard political transfer will follow as in other countries and in this political system, a political party need not have side organizations like students wing, youth wing, labour wing, white panel, blue panel etc. Hence a code of conduct for political parties is necessary. Parties should control politics from norms within and not from the streets with violence through students and youths. All concerned will be equally benefited by disbanding different cadres. About students, I must add that equal opportunity clause of our constitution should apply. Some fortunate students will study abroad in peace and most other students at home be left in fear of constant campus violence and cross firings is something not desirable.

Since NCG has been in place, let us extend our full cooperation to it in all matters. Let us not burden it by raising all sorts of problems. A culture of tolerance is the need of the hour to nurture democracy. Achievement of NCG by whatever means is politically more important than its legality. The 15 February election proved beyond doubt the necessity of holding election under NCG. To raise the legality of the sixth parliament which is the result of the 15th February election may upset the very purpose of NCG.

## OPINION

### Cooperation to NCG Essential

A Hasib

Begum Zia in her first public meeting after resignation threatened to launch a movement unless the neutral caretaker government (NCG) takes action against those officials who expressed their solidarity with the movement against BNP government. For Kheda Zia to issue this warning one day after her resignation and one day after the Chief Adviser taking power cannot as such be appreciated. One must know how to leave without power as also to be in power by maintaining political equilibrium. She attributed her 'downfall' more to the government servants who, according to her, should be neutral. But she forgot her earlier stand that 'no body is neutral except children and mad people'. While it is expected that government officials should be neutral it is necessary to understand why these officials were not so. The reason is that these officials are servants of the republic and are obliged to obey orders from a government based on the doctrine of the majority rule in a 'democratic country'. They could not be expected to serve under a government formed without people's participation in the election. Moreover, Begum Zia perhaps forgot the fact that there is a difference between 1990 and 1996. For in 1990 Ershad had to go because of Dhaka-based movement while in 1996 the movement was country-wide involving majority of the people. In this circumstance the officials could not possibly remain neutral as they are servants of the people