

A Bureaucratic Challenge

Communications, Shipping and Post and Telecommunications Adviser Syed Manzur Elahi has been candid enough to tell some home truths. He does not seem to be critical of the bureaucracy in any outright fashion; rather he points out a diffidence on their part to cooperate with a short-term government — one that is not even elected. The adviser simply echoes what may be the feelings of many people.

While we understand the workings of the bureaucratic mind, we consider it our duty to urge the set-up to take cognizance of an unusual situation they must feel obliged to cope with. We are in fact having to negotiate a course perhaps few nations had ever done before. Just consider the burdensome legacy of this caretaker government. Surely it has been installed in power to oversee the holding of a free and fair election. That being the primary responsibility of the government, no one should expect it to do a lot more than that. But the urgency in so many areas is so strong that things cannot be left for even a day — let alone three more months — where they are. The task of restoring law and order and resuscitating the country's economy must be addressed without a moment's delay.

So here are the imperatives all must take very seriously. The bureaucrats only more so. The reason is quite clear. The caretaker government enjoys constitutional status and the people's goodwill but not their popular mandate. Non-political in character, this government is so much dependent on the bureaucracy during its short tenure to deliver the goods.

All this, therefore, points to the fact that here is a challenge for the bureaucracy. It is time for it to prove its worth. If the bureaucracy can rise up to the task of the time, the nation will so much be the beneficiary. The caretaker government will be able to perform up to the nation's satisfaction if only the bureaucracy takes its job more seriously. After all they are now better placed — since there is no political pressure — to do their job.

Remembering April 17

The true significance of Mujibnagar Day has substantially been lost to claims made for the March 7 oration or the March 26 message becoming the Declaration of Independence and a totally unnecessary counterpoise made over the Zia broadcast calling all to join the fight. While each of March 7 and 26 and 27's events is historic and has more or less well-enuciated significance setting each distinct from the other — there being no point of clash or confusion at all, the case of the Mujibnagar inauguration of our people's first government, in their millennia-old history has gone by default for all of 25 years now.

It is from the goings on at Mujibnagar or Baidyanath-Tola, Meherpur, that this state and its constitution and its sovereignty draw upon their legitimacy. March 7 provided an important alchemy that gave a radically new colour to our people's strivings and the March 26 message consummated it by channeling the change towards independence. The April 17 ceremonies in the mango bower, not far from the groves of Palassey, capped the politics of 23 Pakistan years and metamorphosed all of it into a completely new beginning — a butterfly breaking out of its chrysalis form. On considerations of a formal manifestation of the sum-total of a people's aspirations — social, economic and cultural — that is in the as yet very much indeterminate art and science of carving out a state — the April 17 events soar far above other national happenings.

Till mid-April there were many options open to the Awami League leadership and countless pitfalls, to fall in and be lost for good. The spreadeagled party was then a vessel without a rudder. It is not known if it was Bangabandhu who had enjoined Tajuddin Ahmed to go for the provisional government. But without Tajuddin it is inconceivable that we would have our government as early as April 17, less than a month after the genocide had its first victims shot and bayoneted and burnt alive. A world of physical, international and mental barriers had to be passed, a most formidable Rubicon to be crossed, and he, choosing this from numerous choices, accomplished it, wrapping up the whole thing in less than nine months. Thanks to the lakhs of martyrs and war heroes and heroines and to India.

Remembering April 17 is remembering Liberation War and remembering Tajuddin. There are now some who would rather forget Liberation War and others who would rather not remember Tajuddin. These are patently ways to undermine our independence and sovereign nationhood.

Of Mass Movement

It is not any single party that whips up and leads a mass movement. It is individuals of vastly varied callings and persuasions that shape up a popular upheaval.

A seminar held in Dhaka on Tuesday looked into the complex phenomenon of mass movements and found that these mostly failed to realise what the participants had wanted these to yield. Going beyond useless academic exercise, the seminar recommended a fourfold way to improve upon past experiences of post-movement administrations: (a) voting and returning only pro-Liberation War candidates and parties; (b) effectively resisting black money; (c) black persons; and (d) black arguments.

While endorsing the fourfold way we would like all to look into the difficult fact of a party in power progressively failing to stand for the whole nation and degenerating into upholding party interest only. This a party does for clinging to power and for the same end it undermines all state norms and democratic values. In the present situation some quarters are proving adept in vitiating an otherwise healthful post-movement atmosphere by hurling black arguments. Against such disappointing acts there are fortunately others speaking of a party government expanding to embrace national consensus.

For all of this century, this country always had very good movements followed by very bad governments. We now badly need good governments that would obviate the need of movements.

The "Third Force"

The best known example of a "third force" in recent times has been Ross Perot's advent into US Presidential Elections in 1992 when he weaned away more votes from the then incumbent President Bush than from Bill Clinton and thus cost Bush an election he should have won.

THAT democracy in Pakistan has come to stay is evident from the fact that when talking about the "third force" people do not automatically mean the Pakistan Army anymore but refer to a possible "Alternate" to the major political groupings that has been taking turns ruling this country since 1988. The "third force" presently being talked about is also not the motley minority group of opportunist politicians that after each election jump on the bandwagon of whichever party has more seats but being short of an absolute majority needs the few extra votes to form a government. The "third force" as now envisaged denotes essentially a group of concerned citizens that have become increasingly anxious about the deteriorating socio-economic state of the country, particularly the damage they feel the traditional politicians are doing to this nation. While pressure groups or independent alternate forces are not unknown in politics and the subsequent movement for "damage control" turning into a political entity is not a recent concept, it has not always been a successful experiment in terms of performance and/or achievement once in power.

The best known example of a "third force" in recent times has been Ross Perot's advent into US Presidential Elections in 1992 when he weaned away more votes from the then incumbent President Bush than from Bill Clinton and thus cost Bush an election he should have won. Ross Perot's movement turning into the Reform Party makes interesting study, coincidentally something like President Teddy Roosevelt Jr's successful foray at the turn of the century. Perot is a billionaire US businessman who turned a small computer software venture into a tremendous success. Interestingly his company EDP Resources Inc derived maximum profits from Iran before the Shah fell. His main claim to fame was the rescuing of a few of his em-

ployees from Teheran during the period Americans were in grave danger of being taken as hostages. The narrative account of the episode "on Wings of Eagles" became a best-selling book and later a movie. A former marine, Perot's executives were (and are) ex-serVICemen, former CIA and FBI personnel, ex-Federal and State Government employees, etc. The result is a tight-knit crowd with excellent information and contacts within government. Brash and outspoken, with a campaign war chest of his own personal fortune and a well orchestrated media boost, Perot's appeal to the great silent majority finds a ready audience among those in the US frustrated with the direction their country was taking, away from the ideals it was founded on.

Exploiting the lingering and historic distrust in "big government" among the broad mass of US citizens and a ready wit that is replete with snappy one-liners/repartees, Perot almost snowed both Bush and Clinton under in the 1992 Presidential debates. A discerning observer would have noticed that substance was (and is) lacking in his stance, at best Perot is cursory with issues and he never really expounds a platform or an ideology that is much different from the Republican or Democratic platforms. In short, the battle he fights is less on ideology and more on personality supported by appropriate media sound-bites. However, 19 per cent of the electorate voted for Perot, mostly as an exercise of protest against the business-as-usual attitude of the two major political parties. Senator Dole's supporters are having recurring nightmares that Perot will enter the Presidential race in 1996, taking away crucial votes that would allow President Clinton to beat off the Dole challenge.

In politics, a split vote can

have far-reaching effect. In 1993, the Jamaat-e-Islami led the religious parties into a right-wing alliance that took away a small but crucial percentage of the vote in many constituencies that would have gone to Mian Nawaz Sharif. The result was that with a lesser overall percentage of the vote, though not by much, the Pakistan Democratic Front (PDF) led by the PPP and a breakaway faction of the PML got more seats in the Assemblies. People blame Hamid Nasir Chatha for causing grief to Mian Nawaz Sharif in the 1995 polls, in fact Qazi Husain Ahmad should be given credit for Ms Benazir's victory. Hasina Wajed's Awami League (AL) is considered left

mass public reaction to obtain benefits for themselves, the "taming" of Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, the last of the hold-outs (Mohicans?) being a sorry example. The old politicians being ever-ready to cut a deal, people seldom put much faith in their credibility any longer. The heady effect of power and influence, the comfort of government facilities and largesse, topped by the colour of money and proteges are too obvious a bribe for the old politicians to ever mount a leadership challenge in the manner that they managed with Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) in 1977 and the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) in 1983. Their nuisance value is con-

The common perception of the "Third Force" is that it has its genesis in the frustration of retired ex-servicemen and ex-bureaucrats who, for lack of popular base of their own, turn to carefully selected non-political extremely popular personalities to act as their frontmen, "surfing" the political spectrum, mainly on the grievances of the masses. The central idea is to provide a clean-image, non-partisan, non-political activist form to disseminate their "ideals" on a national basis, making for a platform both credible to the masses and effective in mobilising the mass opinion. The message propounded by the force is clear (and similar in most countries), an already defective system has been compounded by erosion over time, it is time to replace the entire constitutional process to something more acceptable to the "genius" of the people. This may be going too far, our Constitution remains a far-reaching document. Some changes needed are at best procedural, some require constitutional mandate, a Catch-22 scenario that can only be overcome by a referendum on the reforms proposed.

The names that are bandied about in the "third force" in Pakistan are interesting e.g. Imran Khan, Hakim Said, Dr Mahbubul Haq, Moeen Quereshi, Lt Gen (Retd) Hammad Gul etc. Most of the personalities being mentioned deny their aspirations but their denials are not vociferous (or loud) enough to count them out just yet. Should such a movement ever come to power the personalities cannot avoid putting on political garb, in effect becoming what they had been targeting all along, insiders in the political pack. Whereas it is all very well to say that there will be no compromise on issues, that is at best a campaign promise whose mortality rate is gov-

erned by the tally of numbers in parliament. If Ms Benazir now seems to compromise on all that she had pledged over the years, well so did Mian Nawaz Sharif. When he stopped compromising on major issues, he was railroaded out of power and Ms Benazir came back in through an extended exercise of compromise.

Where does one set the limit with one's conscience in order to hang onto power, even though politics is supposed to be the art of compromise? While the emphasis may change and the lines may be clearly drawn, anybody who comes into government comes into the real world or gives way in the matter of ideals. Going strictly by parameters any concession whether big or small is a compromise, as such any promise to "never compromise" on any account can never be considered truthful.

Democracy is fragile in Pakistan and the advent of the "third force" can only be acceptable with certain caveats as it could seriously undermine the democratic process. On the positive side, a "third force" in politics may well put the existing political groupings on notice if they do not perform the approach is constitutional i.e. by taking the approval of the electorate through the exercise of adult franchise, then we must welcome new entrants into the field not tainted by political ramifications.

Politics is usually played in a great pressure cockpit, only those who have the stomach for it can survive, therefore politics must carry with it commitment to stay the course. It would be catastrophic to abandon the people having raised their hopes beyond their expectations.

"Third force" aspirants must not only prove their credentials, they have to show that they have a lasting commitment to their country beyond their individual ambitions. Without that pre-condition, no "third force" can ever be a viable proposition.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

of centre in Bangladesh and will probably end up at least 7-8 percentage points behind the 35-36 per cent that Begum Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) should get even though AL will have the tremendous advantage of the solid bloc of the 15 per cent Hindu vote. With may be 15 per cent of the vote, Gen Ershad's Jatiyo Party (JP), Jamaat-e-Islami with its usual 8 per cent and Muslim League with its likely 6 per cent (a total of around 29-30 per cent) of the vote makes for a sizable "third force" in Bangladesh politics that may not translate into many seats but will command enough to put whoever they go into coalition with over the top.

The "third force" in politics in Pakistan is represented by a bunch of old-time politicians who are past masters at using

finned to politically blackmailing whoever is the incumbent for personal benefit if they can get away with power for themselves that would be another matter, the icing on the cake, which in any case they want to have and to eat also.

The sad thing over the years is the institutionalising of corruption as well as selective accountability for all those not in power. Faced with diminishing public respect for institutions and a severe loss of credibility in the rule of law, concerned citizens are increasingly giving voice to their grievances through a number of new forums rather than the established political ones. That is enough grist in the rumour mill that there is more than a whispering campaign about a new "third force" whose saving grace is a politicians-free environment.

Caretaker Government, Election Commission and People's Expectations

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam

Keeping EC's Secretariat with Chief Adviser of the caretaker government for holding free and fair election may look all right; but not under any party government, for by-elections and local elections, as the precedences amply demonstrate. The Chief Adviser may consider to place EC's Secretariat right now under CEC.

NOW that a non-party caretaker government is in power, running the affairs of the country, the people naturally are looking for continued political stability and a free and fair next parliament election. The great sacrifices made by the people and huge losses incurred in trade and commerce can hardly be overlooked, if leaders really mean business now. There is no use to play hide and seek about figures of colossal losses and engage in acrimony by the political parties. What is fact cannot be denied. Considering the available statistics, we can say that about two hundred persons were killed, 174 working days were lost during hartal, gheraos, barricades and non-cooperation in the last 22 months. The survey reveals that Tk 35 thousand crore has been lost during those months. However, the reported loss of the then BNP government was double to the above mentioned figure i.e. Tk 70 thousand crore. Added to it, thousands were injured and thousands imprisoned. These are measurable quantities, which can be identified by the concerned ministries, particularly Finance and Planning Ministry, Planning Commission and Home Ministry, under the non-party caretaker government. Since we are now in the last quarter of current financial year, which will end

on 30th June 1996, and budget for 1996-97 is obviously under preparation, as a matter of routine, the above facts deserve consideration to open new budget lines and to rebuild the economy and help the needy.

Generally, authorities lose sight of the impact of the persons killed in political frenzy on their families, of extent of injury and its effect on one's earning capability. The mass upsurge '96 might have shaken the conscience of the bureaucracy and in that event it is not a difficult exercise to arrive at definite figures for planning assistance and development. We will not propose for, say, 29 task forces, as were under the first caretaker government of Acting President Shahabuddin Ahmed. Because, we have sad experience of seeing that those in power, political as well as administrative, later ignored such reports; and because the tenure of present non-party caretaker government is also limited. So, immediate steps deemed necessary to record the sacrifices of those, who lost their lives in the struggle for caretaker government and its

achievement. Their death, injury and suffering in jail must not go unnoticed in planning and budgetary measures. We are sure that the Eleven Advisers, who have noticed the events of last 22 months, are well aware of it, perhaps, more sensitive and sympathetic than others in that.

Thirteenth Amendment provides that "58D. Functions of Non-Party Caretaker Government — (1) The Non-Party Caretaker Government shall discharge its functions as an interim government and shall carry on the routine functions of such government with the aid and assistance of persons in the services of the Republic; and, except in the case of necessity for the discharge of such functions it shall not make any policy decision. (2) The non-party caretaker government shall give to the Election Commission all possible aid and assistance that may be required for holding the general election of members of parliament peacefully, fairly and impartially.

For the present caretaker government and Chief Election Commissioner, the task is a bit simpler. Because, earlier, laws

and ordinances made by Acting President Shahabuddin Ahmed, to carry on the caretaker government functions, and ensure free, fair and impartial election are available there. These, together with updated Electoral Laws and code of conduct, made in the preceding nine months, may smoothen the process, so far as legal side is concerned. All these will be available in the Election Commission and the Ministry of Law. The Public Relations Officer of Election, Commission is supposed to put up the relevant newspaper clippings to the CEC for his perusal. In this regard, the new CEC may have to immediately consider the repromulgation of ordinances on loan defaulter and code of conduct, as appeared in the press recently.

The outgoing CEC had, of course, brought some legal and administrative changes; and further more are needed, which he could not. It is a fact that he did not get a full time Secretary for the Election Commissioner's Secretariat. Election Commission Secretariat remained a part of the Prime Minister's office. As such, in the distribution of

portfolios of caretaker government, we find the Election Commission Secretariat is under the Chief Adviser, Unless the Election Commission Secretariat is placed under the CEC, it will again be under Prime Minister's office after expiry of the term of non-party caretaker government.

Keeping EC's Secretariat with Chief Adviser of the caretaker government for holding free and fair election may look all right; but not under any party government, for by-elections and local elections, as the precedences amply demonstrate. The Chief Adviser may consider to place EC's Secretariat right now under CEC. Perhaps, had this point not missed from the view of caretaker government in 1991, and more powers vested in CEC, including that for cancellation of election results, then Mirpur and Magura incidents could be checked by CEC. The outgoing CEC had said to press that he could not imagine that there would be vote rigging, stealing of ballot papers and other irregularities, even in 'one party election.' This calls for a total review of the political, legal and administrative structure in the

electoral arena.

Apart from the above, CEC may take up two pending recommendations, for promulgation of ordinances. One: The retired government servants will not be eligible to contest parliament elections for five years from the date of retirement. Two: Political parties' registration with EC. In the neighbouring countries, such laws are in force. It has been observed that the last BNP government was not inclined to make such legislation. Even an officer, while in service, got nomination of BNP; later on, however, he resigned when the information was leaked out. About participation of retired government servants, there are numerous cases over the last 20 years. Like in other countries, they should not be encouraged to participate in election for a certain period.

We had free and fair election in 1991; but the elected government could not ensure democracy, and fair election later on. Let the ensuing election under caretaker government now pave the way for a really democratic government, responsive to the needs of the people and development, at least at par with our neighbouring countries. And we should not forget that election is essentially a political process, not merely administrative.

The writer is an economist and Advocate, Bangladesh Supreme Court.

To the Editor

'Air safety'

Sir, Mr. Hedayet Ahmed deserves thanks for his informative letter (DS, 6 April) which he wrote with reference to my letter on the above subject.

Well, I would like to quote here the last part of his letter: "Air safety is a highly sophisticated subject and let us leave it to the specialists who know what it is all about to deal with it. Why should we indulge in this fancy?"

Truly speaking, in my letter I didn't actually try to pass any expert view on air safety but what I did is only to register my general concern about the importance of strengthening flight safety and security system because the rate of air accidents has been up in recent days.

It may be mentioned here that in my letter I referred to the Peruvian commercial jet-Boeing 737 which crashed shortly before landing, killing all 123 passengers on board. Incidentally, the plane which had been crashed with 35 passengers including the US Commerce Secretary was also a military version of a Boeing 737 (T-43 plane). And the probable cause of the accident as revealed is mechanical fault in the plane.

A few days ago, as I returned back home after seeing off a family member at the ZIA, the telephone rang, the air-passenger was speaking to me from the departure lounge. The plane (of a reputed airlines) has developed some mechanical take-off. The faults were detected just before the flight. Then it took more than three hours and the passengers had to sit inside the plane until the defect could be repaired and journey started.

Meanwhile, there was a typographical mistake in the abbreviation of IATA. Mr. Ahmed is correct, the abbreviation is — International Air Transport (not Traffic) Association.

M. Zahidul Haque, Asstt Prof, BAI, Dhaka

Bill of rights

Sir, I have read with much interest the article published in your esteemed daily on 25.3.96 under the heading "A Bill of Rights for the Citizens of Bangladesh". The writer has rightly pointed out why our leaders have not undertaken the programme of hunger strike. Even they could go on token hunger strike if not hunger strike unto death. It is because of fear for losing health or life though they are all the times ready to dedicate themselves for the welfare of the people. It is needless to say that our leaders did not suffer as much as the common man and daily labourers during different political programmes like hartal, blockade, gherao, non-cooperation, govt. etc. The sufferings of the common people knew no bound. Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches.

Right to fulfilment of commitment given by the candidate to people at the time of election. It is known to us that the candidates promise to do such and such good works for the welfare of the people, but, after election, they forget their commitment. (2) Right to settlement of charter of demand raised by the union or association in due time if it is reasonable. It appears that the concerned authorities or ministries do not give importance to the charter of demand submitted by a union till the situation goes beyond control.

A M Kais Chowdhury, Masdarhat Gorthan Road, Narayanganj

Service rule violation

Sir, I am rather feeling frustrated to see that some of your correspondents are making news items posing a question mark "Fundamental rights or service rules violation?", as disciplinary and departmental action must be in the offing against those Servants of the Republic who blatantly violated service rules.

There cannot be any controversy in respect of government officials' participation in politics. Service rule is very clear, it does not allow political activity. I am also surprised to learn that one official — no less than a Secretary — tried to defend their ulterior motive by saying that they went to President to submit, among other things, appeal to form a caretaker government. I want to ask you are they to ask for caretaker government and what's of that to them? I feel Hon'ble President would have done a service to the nation if he had refused to receive such illogical and impertinent representation.

Another queerish thing (as reportedly pointed out by the officials) was printed by you "Janatar Manch was not totally a political one!" Then what was it? Was it the caricature stage built to mock at the immense sufferings of the common men, trade and industry during the unprecedented hartal and non-cooperation movement?

A F Rahman, Dhaka

Victory of Sri Lanka

Sir, The victory of Sri Lanka in the 6th World Cup Cricket is a happy phenomenon for us. It is really surprising that some of our local media termed the victory of Sri Lanka as "unexpected". Such comment wouldn't have been passed if any western country had achieved this glory.

Didn't the Lankans deserved this victory? Definitely they achieved it by virtue of their unusually artistic performance. I would like to focus on the victory of Sri Lanka from a different dimension. The westerners generally regard the people of South Asia as not so civilised and cultured. But we the people of South Asia have given a proper rejoinder by securing the World Cricket Cup in the last two finals.

We have preserved our supremacy and ascendancy over the West in this respect. Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India are the trio in the arena of cricket. So the victory of Sri Lanka is the victory of South Asia, and two some extent, the victory of SAARC.

Mahmudul Hasan, 102, Surya Sen Hall, University of Dhaka

OPINION

Undue Privilege to Certain Columnists?

K R Zakhmi

I am afraid that The Daily Star has given too much importance to a particular columnist, and doesn't hesitate in publishing even not so well written pieces on the top of editorial space. On third of March last, "ON THE RECORD" written by Mr Shah A S M Kibria, with a two-dozen-word heading to impress the readers was one such instance. First, the subject,— BT, CNN and BBC was out of tune with the political situation prevailing in the country. The questions asked by the writer were not sweeping. He simply tried to accuse Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the only culprit who was responsible for the undemocratic policy of the Information Department of the Government.

He surely made a few remarks about the affair while H M Ershad was in power and then took great-lead backward to sweep upon Gen Ayub Khan, ignoring totally the period of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who unfortunately acted in a way which is not even expected of any dictator. He introduced one party government, banned all newspapers, turned the vibrant press into a government department and the radio and television were also used simply to eulogise him under every circumstances. What made Mr Kibria mum over making even oblique reference to this sad episode? Mr Kibria is free to favour

any political party of his choice. He may even sacrifice his valuable life for the cause of his party to which he owe allegiance. But as a columnist of a newspaper which class to be "independent" he must not cross the "Laxman Rekha". In his own interest, he should use his faculty for serving the cause of the nation instead of propagating even the dicey plans and programmes of single party. He may speak whatever he likes in a roadside public meeting, but he is not expected to use the columns of newspapers to speak half truth and assassinate the character of his opponent.

As readers of The Daily Star, we do not like freedom given by it to such writers who prefer to throw riotous stones from their glass houses. Please be cautious in selecting articles for the editorial page on the basis of the worthiness of the piece itself instead of honouring the big names. Invite a few more writers who were previously attached to high civil, military and diplomatic posts at home or abroad, to write for this paper.

In the meantime, we would like to read Muslehuddin Ahmed, more frequently, especially on Middle East problems. I surmise he was also a top diplomat, but has emerged as a good columnist also. He writes like a seasoned journalist in correct perspective of the past and present, and surely with a vision of future.