

Code of Conduct

It is good news that the EC-drafted 27-point code of conduct has an endorsement from all the major political parties. When the contending — often bitterly rivalrous — parties agree on the various guidelines to be followed by them for smoothly holding a free and fair election, it certainly augurs well for the democratic process. A good beginning is always welcome and makes the task so much the easier for completion. It should not, however, give a false sense that there is scope for relaxation at any point before the election is over.

The fact that all the major political parties not only gave their consent to the code of conduct but have actually contributed to its formulation, makes the code an inviolable agreement which has to be honoured. For all practical purposes, the code of conduct has become an article of trust between the political parties and the voters. The underlining point is to turn the whole election process into a rational, fair and unhindered competition.

What we need now is a public announcement from all the parties that they fully endorse the code of conduct and that they stand committed to abiding by the same. The next thing that comes in order of importance is to take effective measures by the party hierarchies to percolate this message down to the bottom of their organisations. The do's and don'ts have to be followed in their letter and spirit. Let the onus be on the parties to uphold the agreed principles and norms.

Here is a test case for the parties' commitment to democracy. The more transparent a party becomes during the electioneering, the greater endorsement by people it is expected to enjoy. A strong monitoring system must be in place to inform the people as to which party is blamable for a breach of the code of conduct, if any. That way the people will be better equipped to make their own judgement on both the parties and the candidates.

We must remember that the EC cannot solely be responsible for implementing the code. In fact, the responsibility lies fully and solely with the political parties.

Empowering the Pollsmen

Teachers drawn from various levels form the mainstay of the conduct of general elections. From no other single profession can you get so many at once and capable of doing the needful with so much fairness and competence. In any democratic nation what the teachers do at the polling centres could be a delightful diversion for them. Not so in Bangladesh. The centres often enough are taken over by pirates looting ballots and stuffing boxes with them and the centre locale do turn into war exercise zones. What are the teachers and other officials in charge of the centre supposed to do against this?

It is good that the teachers have taken their problem to Chief Adviser Muhammad Habibur Rahman and placed before him a number of very wise recommendations. Presiding officers must be duly empowered to prevent violations of their centres by gangs and to ensure smooth and unhindered voting and an atmosphere congenial to the exercise of their right. This empowerment should be made by giving them magisterial powers of arresting and summarily punishing trespassers and carriers of arms.

We support this sensible recommendation. In fact the presiding officers should be enjoined to keep the centres clear of all not discharging election duties. As things are now, the officers hardly feel bold enough to ask anyone to clear out. The empowerment and a judicious use of this should heal the centre chief of such beleaguered mentality and help him effectively preside over the day's proceedings.

But how can the presiding officers put into effect their powers without an armed posse of adequate strength? The teachers' recommendation is that elections be held on different dates in different zones to help government mobilise maximum security at all polling centers.

While it is necessary that there be enough armed personnel to ensure trouble-free polling and its follow-ups, staggering the election over different days may not at all be advisable. Results or even rumoured results of the first day of polling will tend to influence voting on the subsequent days. The chance of better mobilisation of security personnel on different days would offer a golden opportunity to parties to concentrate on smaller areas and influence voting undesirably.

The government must exhaust all of its resources, if need be, to properly man the polling centres against all kinds of violation. And this has to be done without staggering the polls.

We are happy the teachers have spoken out at the right place and at the right moment.

Meeting Forest Emergency

Mercifully the fire that raged for two days in the Sundarbans has been brought under control. Preliminary reports say that only 200 acres were burnt down and the damage is not extensive. We might count ourselves very lucky if two days' fire has caused so little damage. Hats off to the various agencies and individuals who lent their hands in this most daunting fire fighting effort.

The situation certainly could be worse and we might have ended up with a catastrophe. However, here is a warning served by this incident for us to raise the level of preparedness against a large-scale bush fire — like the ones that occur in Australia or the USA. Do we have the equipment and trained personnel in place to fight such an inferno? Certainly not. The Sundarbans spreading in the south and south-west of the country are a unique mangrove forest protecting the country from very many natural onslaughts.

The nation earns a huge income from the Sundarbans. From its annual revenue receipts let us set aside a small portion to create a fund for meeting the emergencies such as the one that we just experienced.

Foreign Policy No Substitute for Domestic Issues

by Mohiuddin Ahmed

QUITE early in the election campaign the major political parties particularly BNP — have focused on foreign policy issues. BNP has tried to present itself as the defender of independence and sovereignty while accusing that its opponents would sell out the country. It is a false start for us there are more pressing domestic policy issues which need to be addressed by all the major political parties contesting the election. It is often said that politicians pick up foreign policy issues when they have little credible to offer on domestic policies. For a small country like Bangladesh foreign policy is a less important issue — and whatever importance it has derives from its domestic implications. Foreign policy can be important for major powers — such as USA — which have to play a global role.

Constitutional and ideological basis of foreign policy: The fundamentals of our foreign policy are enunciated in the Constitution. Broadly, these include the following principles: respect for sovereignty of other countries, peaceful settlement of international disputes, respect for international law and the principles of the UN Charter; renunciation of use of force in international relations and disarmament; right of self-determination for all peoples; and support for oppressed peoples in just struggles against imperialism, colonialism or racism. [Article 25(1)]

The above principles were incorporated in the original Constitution adopted in 1972. A new ideological element was added in 1977 aimed at promoting relations with Muslim countries. The State shall endeavour to consolidate, preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity. [Article 25(2)]

The amendment was effected through Proclamation Order No. 1 of 1977. Our foreign policy has evolved within these parameters. However, there are occasions when the government had to take sides in conflicts among friendly countries. For instance, in the Gulf War we took sides with Kuwait though the Constitution enjoins on us the task of consolidating and strengthening fraternal relations among Muslim countries. The ideology has to be pursued with a sense of pragmatism.

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Phases of foreign policy: Our foreign policy was influenced by the experience of the War of Independence and ideological orientations of successive governments as well as expediency. The USSR, India and most socialist or communist countries excepting China supported the war. That laid the basis for close relations with India, USSR and the socialist countries in the early stage of our independence.

During the war and immediately after independence, Bangladesh sought to win recognition and expand diplomatic relations widely. It won membership of Commonwealth, UN, OIC and NAM. Membership of some of the UN system institutions had preceded UN membership; they can admit members independently of UN — e.g. WHO, ILO, UNESCO, etc. Recognition by non-socialist countries also increased. Bangladesh's visit to Egypt and Kuwait signified closer relations with Muslim

countries among the member-countries and reduce tension among them. According to many a hidden agenda was to join together to overcome Indian influence in the region which derived from its size as well as location in the region. SAARC does not reject closer relation with India, rather it provides a new forum for enhanced relation between all member-countries including India. SAARC attains enhanced significance in the post-Cold War system of international relations. The rigid division of the Cold War world into two blocs led by two super powers is being replaced by a more complex mosaic of relationship. According to Henry Kissinger — a pragmatist and believer in gunboat diplomacy — the new international system will have 'at least six major powers — the United States, Europe, China, Japan, Russia, and probably India — as well as a multiplicity of

countries, removal of which can increase trade. This will be an essential element in successful implementation of SAPTA. Begum Khaleida Zia can take some credit for these successful steps towards cooperation; she was Prime Minister and Chairperson of SAARC when some of these initiatives were taken.

Growing imbalance of payments between Bangladesh and India — the imbalance being against Bangladesh — has surfaced as an intriguing problem. However, the problem has been handled in the context of an obsolete — if not uninformed — economic paradigm. Trade liberalisation started much earlier in Bangladesh and it is also deeper than in India. A liberalising country experiences a sharp increase in import and a growing current account gap. SAPTA provides for preferential trade arrangements among the member countries. As a result,

jamdani were exported. It would still be insignificant; more importantly, the inputs for jamdani excepting labour are mostly imported — perhaps some from India. On the net, export of value addition is much too small relative to the magnitude and complexity of the problem.

Statesmanship and responsibility: The BNP leadership did not pick on these issues; they chose issues which are emotionally surcharged and presented them in confusing innuendoes. They referred to threat to sovereignty of the country and the so-called 'treaty of slavery' (Golamir chukto), both representing sentimental aspects of the same phenomenon, i.e. threat from India and convenience of some parties or leaders to act as India's quislings. These statements raise serious questions of statesmanship and administrative responsibility.

The treaty is not easily accessible to the public. If it is a

political debate. We suggest that the following be considered for inclusion in the Code of Conduct.

First, no politician and candidate can use any information in their favour or against their opponents if they had access to it while discharging their official responsibility. This is only enforcing the rule of confidentiality which already exists. However, if the information is not secret and they want to use it, the Commission must ask the government to publish it and make it easily accessible to the public.

Secondly, if any candidate and politician infringes the confidentiality principle, they should be liable to punishment including disqualification for Parliamentary election.

Thirdly, the Commission should invoke the constitutional provision which makes people having allegiance to foreign states ineligible for membership of Parliament. [Article 66 (2)(c)]. Anyone who levels such allegation against any candidate, political party and leader in any manner explicit or implicit should be called upon to prove it; failure to prove the allegation should be made a punishable offence and render the person making the allegation ineligible for Parliamentary candidature.

Finally, public statements and speeches must conform with the foreign policy position stated in the party manifesto and election manifesto. Every political party has the right to declare the foreign policy it wants to pursue, subject to conformity with the Constitution. If its public statements are in conflict with the position stated in the manifesto, it is misleading public opinion which is contrary to responsible and transparent election campaign.

On all these scores, the Commission may issue warning to the candidates and politicians to start with, for some of the major leaders may come under the mischief of this conduct, rule and election will be so much meaningless without their participation. Enforcement of the conduct suggested here is well within the mandate of the EC; the purpose of an independent Commission is to ensure that there is greater transparency in election proceedings and the conduct of political leadership shows greater sense of responsibility.

Costly mistakes in foreign policy: The pronouncements of the political parties — especially their leaders — will influence our future foreign policies. The cost of mistakes can be high. Populist campaign may win some votes, given the inadequate information and vague formulation of views. But this will also determine how much trust others can place in our leadership. It is important for political relation as much as for creating confidence in foreign investors. Begum Khaleida Zia's statements indicate a weak grasp of the sensitivity of foreign policy. Five years as Prime Minister and the high pedestal of the SAARC Chairperson made little difference to her capacity to comprehend the complexity of foreign policy issues; given a choice between crude appeal for vote and the subtlety of international relations, her political instinct tilts in favour of the former. In this context, the following read from Henry Kissinger may induce some sobriety among our contending leaders:

There is a vast difference between the perspective of an analyst and that of a statesman... The analyst can allot whatever time is necessary to come to a clear conclusion; the statesman has to make a decision in a matter of minutes. The analyst runs no risk. If his conclusions prove wrong, he can write another treatise. The statesman is permitted only one guess; his mistakes are irretrievable. (Diplomacy, 1995, p. 27).

To the Editor...

Burning houses

Sir, A report, published in a daily newspaper on April 19, 1996 about Awami League celebrating victory, is astounding. It was stated that about 400 Awami League activists equipped with guns, pistols, sharp weapons and *lathis* led by Chowgachha thana Awami League secretary raided Chandpur village and Huda Chowgachha, looted valuables, sprayed kerosene on houses and set them on fire.

As a result, houses, *golas*, cowsheds and other valuables were turned into ashes. Awami League activists did not even allow the villagers to try to put off the fire. They also manhandled women and children. It was learnt that the victims were supporters of BNP. We are stunned and just can't believe this sort of event happening in every country, there are supporters of different political parties but I don't know if it ever happened anywhere else in the world.

We know that after a fierce fighting when a land is conquered, the victors sometimes behave like it but the circumstances in our country is not like that. What victory are they celebrating at the cost of people's sufferings? Do they consider themselves as outsiders? I should like to think what will be the outcome if AL wins the next general election and the celebrating mood like the one mentioned above takes place again.

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The Statistical Year Book of Bangladesh

Sir, After the Renaissance, French Revolution and Industrial Revolution, the world is now going through another new revolution — Information Revolution. But observing the prevailing situation in our country, it seems to me that we have really fallen behind from the rest of the world in this regard.

Everybody will agree that information is power, and it helps a country to attract foreign investors, uphold its status to the international community. But our country is failing to do this important task. In this connection, I want to say about the Statistical Year Book of Bangladesh-1995, published by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. Like every year, it saw the light of the day in January, 1996. But the dates it has put are two years old, because most of the data it contains are of the year 1993 and a few of 1994. The data of 1995 are absent in this Book.

Everybody knows that Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics is a big organisation under the Planning Ministry with skilled people. But the job they have done reminds one of the proverb 'Much cry and little wool'.

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Less than Half a Loaf, but Something

AFTER waiting several years for US military equipment that it had already paid for, there now seems to be some light at the end of the tunnel in Pakistan's quest for actual transfer of some of the equipment to this country. After the sanctions mandated by the Pressler Amendment came into effect in 1990, successive Pakistani governments have been fighting a continuous battle to obtain 1) mainly the F-16s parked in the Mojave Desert for which it had already paid \$658 million, 2) the package of equipment including P-3C Orion aircraft, Harpoon missiles, AIM-9L sidewinders, etc. for which it had already paid \$368 million, and 3) equipment of various categories worth \$284 million, the money already having been paid, but which the US government considers significant upgrade in the same manner as it does the F-16s.

Sponsored by US Senator Hank Brown, the Brown Amendment was signed in January 1996 into law as part of the 1997 Foreign Operation Appropriations Bill. This is essentially a 'Clarification of Sanctions on Pakistan' that allows equipment already paid for (other than F-16s) pursuant to contracts or cases entered into before Oct 1, 1990 to be transferred to Pakistan. Stymied by this success, something that Ambassador Ms Maleeha Lodhi can be rightly proud of, the anti-Pakistan and non-proliferation lobbies lost no time in inventing new excuses to delay deliveries. Over a 100 news items appeared in the US press in March 1996 about the alleged supply of 'ring magnets' from China to Pakistan meant for use in uranium enrichment. Despite the flimsy evidence at hand, the US Administration seriously considered sanctions against both China and Pakistan.

The anti-China lobby which had been militating against the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to China added their nuisance value. With Republicans looking for issues against the incumbent Democratic President in an election-year makes it even more complicated for Pakistan. If nothing else, justice has been denied these many years by being delayed. Justice is now being partially delivered, without the crucial F-16s we desperately need to augment our air defenses.

President Clinton informed Pakistan Prime Minister Ms Benazir Bhutto through visiting US Assistant Secretary of State Robin Raphel that despite obvious 'problems' he intended to implement the Brown Amendment. One should be grateful for small mercies, Pakistan should thus get delivery of a package of US military equipment that it had already paid \$368 million for, i.e. 1) 3x P-3C Orion aircraft, 2) 28x Harpoon anti-ship missiles, 3) 360x AIM-9L Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, 4) 18x C-130H night-sighting and targeting kits for

Cobra helicopters and 5) 24x M-198 towed howitzers. For weaponry that would continue to be held captive by US because of non-proliferation sanctions, mandated by Pressler, Pakistan would get a refund of \$284 million. The US Federal Reserve Bank will release a cheque to Pakistan for \$124 million, followed in June by \$160 million or so in foreign military sales (FMS) credits. This welcome development notwithstanding, cases worth US\$ 750 million remain in dispute. Or this amount \$658 million is for F-16s and about \$60 million for spare parts, missiles, etc., for the Brooke and Garcia-class frigates earlier released to Pakistan and then later rescinded in the package allowable in the Brown Amendment. In the package considered deliverable, \$24 million worth of night sights, etc., for the Cobra gunships are taken to be a significant military upgrade and such remain contentious equipment which may never be delivered to Pakistan.

Despite the many obstacles raised by powerful lobbies orchestrated by the Indians, friends of Pakistan within the US Administration and Congress have been mobilised by Ambassador Lodhi and her team to convince President Clinton that the commitment to Pakistan must be kept so as to bolster the sagging mutual relationships in a region that needs Pakistan as a moderate counterbalance.

Within Pakistan, cynics remain very vocal about the 'junk' to be given to the country as a sop to the critical requirement of F-16s for the Pakistan Air Force (PAF). Part of this is misconception derived from the equipment that Pakistan had sent for repairs, retrofitting and modernisation, which, in fact, can really be classified as almost junk after all these years in storage. On the other hand, the P-3C Orion aircraft is capable of acquiring targets at 150 km and launching Harpoon missiles at 120 km range, i.e. from outside the radar range of Indian naval warships, and as such an important piece of military hardware that is a must for our vastly outnumbered and outgunned Navy.

While Pakistan already possesses Harpoon ship-to-ship version, the radar range of Pakistan naval platforms are about the same as for their Indian counterparts, therefore the induction of the air-to-ship version will be quite a force multiplier for the Navy, for the PAF the sidewinder missiles now being acquired is the AIM-9L series, a third-generation

model that is capable of detecting decoys en route to the target after launching from the aircraft. This 'smart' missile is a much-needed addition to its armoury given the numbers it will have to engage in air combat to maintain vitally necessary air superiority over the battlefield. The non-delivery of F-16s remains an acute disappointment for us, particularly because of the aging of our combat aircraft but one cannot write off the equipment to be delivered as 'junk'.

The Defence Consultative Committee (DCC) of the cabinet met in full strength on April 18, 1996 to consider the action to be taken about the disputed equipment or the \$750 million amount thereof in lieu, whether to take legal action against the US in either the US Courts or the International Court of Justice at the Hague. The Statute of limitations running for six years, the Pakistani establishment has been worried that it would expire in September this year if one

escalation. When Admiral Sirohey, then Chairman of JSCS, was asked in 1991 whether the US would be then seeking for submarines given the priority then other equipment on the critical list for the Armed Forces, he opted for equipment for Services other than the Navy.

The billion US dollar submarine deal with France rushed through in 1995 is thus held up as an example of a not-so critical purchase just to obtain commissions. These charges involve personalities other than those civilians normally targeted by rumours as the actual recipient of commissions. Without the active participation and collaboration of the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staffs Committee (CJSSC), currently Air Chief Marshal Farooq Khan, and the Chiefs of Air and Navy Staff, Air Marshal Abbas Khattak and Admiral Mansurul Haq Malik respectively, the conspiracy theory fails. Moreover, it will also have to include a number of purely technical officers right down the line since induction of a new weapons system into the inventory of a Service is not an ordinary, routine thing. One or the other officer of integrity and patriotism in the packing order will block malfeasance from taking place, i.e. if he is not removed as an 'obstacle' by retirement, supersession, transfers etc.

On the other hand, for those who consider bribes as far-fetched fairy tales, a few months ago a Military Attaché (MAJ) conveniently left a briefcase containing half a million US dollars in a Major General's office, either as a bribe or to entrap him so as to facilitate his removal since he was an obstacle to a particular sale. The General Officer immediately brought this to the notice of his superiors in GHQ, getting a buss on both cheeks by an emotionally charged COAS, Gen Waheed, for having the integrity and courage to walk away from such a sum. How many of us can really do that? Stories about commissions will not simply fade away, to satisfy the mass public opinion why not commission (no pun intended) a professional investigation company to trace so-called 'bribe money' as was done in the Bofors scandal in India?

For the moment, we must make the best of a bad deal. The Brown Amendment gives us some equipment that we badly need, at the same time it signals a reversal of US policy that was initiated to our detriment six years ago. As long as we have not compromised our independence and integrity to obtain them, we must accept that something is better than nothing. The US government has shown a level of commitment that is commendable in an election year. One hopes that no promises have been made which would ensure longevity for the Benazir government but only at the cost or security craved for by Pakistan as a nation.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

counts the period from October 1990 when the sanctions were applied. However, legal experts are of the opinion that the default on the contract took place in October 1993 when the first aircraft were due to be delivered and such we still have time till 1999 to pursue the legal option if we so choose.

The US government does not seem to have any intention of handing over the F-16s in the Mojave Desert to us but the Benazir government seems to be anxious not to embarrass President Clinton by taking the US Administration to court when he has been so forthcoming towards Pakistan, critics are of the view that there is some dark unexplained reason for not pursuing the legal option, given the advantage or logic and facts on our side.

The darker side remains very much a matter of speculation and/or speculation to support the contention that the present Government of Pakistan (GOP) has not really been interested in acquiring the F-16s. This school of thought contends that Benazir government is actually interested in purchasing Mirage-2000s at \$80 to 90 million per aircraft at 3 times the value of the F-16s and as such did nothing more vigorous than mere lip-service. When Mian Nawaz Sharif visited France as PM in 1992 Mirage-2000s were being touted at \$35-40 million each (fully loaded) and the steep rise to more than double of the value is said to be because of the commissions involved and not the normal