

Trimmer Administration

The need for streamlining the government administration through restructuring, and even reduction in the number of its organisations...

To that end the committee has made specific recommendations such as bringing down the number of ministries from the existing 35 to 22...

As for the, reduced number of ministries even a few of them could be renamed according to the recommendations. That is in line with the reorganisation agenda. However, we find the proposed separation of the communication ministry from the transport ministry...

Let Them Do Their Job

It takes at least two to run a government. The Opposition's role in it is not wholly as a junior partner. It is a junior partner all right but with the great difference that no worthwhile governance can take shape and effect without its co-operation.

People, perhaps without an exception, are weighing each step of the new government. There is no escape for any word uttered and any action taken. The opposition appears to be oblivious of the fact that they are also being evaluated for each one of their pronouncements and steps.

Begum Khaleida Zia addressed on Tuesday a press conference in Dhaka. The expectation on the part of those having the good of the nation at heart was she would say something befitting the wisdom of statesmen...

A big ponderous party like BNP with crores supporting it could do wonders in acting as an effective check to the government's possible degeneration into the waywardness of the earlier governments.

All for This?

Kalpna Rani Chakma, the tribal girl from the Hill Tracts whose kidnapping recently triggered off a country-wide consciousness against the abduction malady was not the first victim of the vanishing act.

But that spirit looks destined to dilute in lucidness by the recent turn of events about law enforcers' sweaty search to trace the girl. Reportedly, they produced before the court one Tripti Begum whom they picked up from a village in Jhenidah on the suspicion of her being a camouflaged Kalpna.

We are peeved by and feel strongly about the mode of operation of the police which is giving birth to news like the one we are dealing with now. Because if this search fizzle into an abortive one and a few more attempts follow suit, the sting, urgency or seriousness surrounding this strange and sad case will disappear like the very act on the carpet.

MP's Salary: A Classic Case in British Parliament

An interesting development took place in the British Parliament recently. The issue has a set pattern mooted in parliaments perhaps in all other countries, but the manner of voting, given the subject matter in question, was highly interesting.

The issue was one of paramount interest, but not on the domain of national and international politics. It related to the members themselves. The motion was a proposal to increase the existing salary of British parliamentarians.

It was an independent body, Senior Salary Review Body, bereft of any member of parliament, that had been entrusted with the task of assessing the need for a raise or otherwise of members of the parliament.

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The recommendations found favour not only with the back benches of the principal political parties but also among ministers and shadow ministers in the parliament. The motion was carried by an overwhelming majority of members.

The capacity has not been expanded since 1950, when reconstruction of the parliament building became complete following devastation caused by German bombing in 1941.

Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

What is most interesting is that both the Leader of the House (Prime Minister) and the Leader of Opposition (Shadow Prime Minister) were vehemently against such a high raise, had expressed their views in public before the vote and, finally, voted against the proposal.

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Functioning of United Front Government

Nikhil Chakravartty writes from New Delhi

There is always the talk that a section of the Congress would like to join the Deve Gowda government, and Sharad Pawar's name is often mentioned in this connection. This is not likely to happen unless and until the United Front itself is broken up through revolts and squabbles.

WHEN Deve Gowda was sworn in as the Prime Minister of India two months ago, it was acknowledged that he would be heading a coalition government in which the regional parties would be significant constituents, apart from the Congress whose support from outside constitutes the life-line for the United Front from Ministry.

The experience of the last two months of functioning of the United Front government has brought out some significant features which are unique to the present coalition set-up. For one thing, the composition of the new government has largely been dictated by regional pressures instead of being on the merit of the new Ministers and their suitability for the portfolios they hold.

The issue which evoked the widest public protest has been the unprecedented price hike of petroleum products which has opened up the danger of serious inflation and price rise affecting vast sections of the underprivileged in society. Most of the other constituents of the United Front were annoyed at this unilateral announcement of petroleum price hike, but they had to accept the fait accompli because the only alternative left before them would have been to vote the government out of power.

In this context, it is interesting to note the Congress inter-action with the United Front. When the CMP was announced, the Congress announced that it would support the proposals embodied in it. Although the Congress leadership particularly Narasimha Rao has been involved in a number of cases pertaining to Chandraswamy's activities as also those of his own son and nephew, he has until now, been able to retain majority support both within the parliamentary party of the Congress as also in the Pradesh organisations as a whole.

There is not surprising that the handling of major issues such as Kashmir and the problems of the North-East, will pose the real test for the United Front government. Although Deve Gowda has so far proceeded along lines in Kashmir which are acceptable to all the parties in Parliament, it is yet to be seen how the alienated people in the Kashmir Valley would respond to the present government.

To the Editor...

Neutral media

Sir, A recent letter in your letter column written by Natasha Kamal on 8/8/96 under the heading 'Neutral Media' drew my attention and I would like to say a few words regarding this. While explaining her stand she has given various statements which can easily be countered but I do not want to do that.

The prime minister herself wanted criticism so that any wrongdoing can be rectified - so why stop that? This can be a real benefit to the government party, they can make their choice which issue to consider and which not. I agree with her on one point. Yes, there are some newspapers which are not neutral. The editors or owners of the papers belong to certain political parties.

Air pollution

Sir, Recently in the annual general meeting of Bangladesh Society for Conservation of Environment, the activities of the Society as well as the environmental situation of Bangladesh was reviewed. The members of BSCE stressed the need for accelerating action programme towards ensuring a pollution-free environment.

demands were not achieved. We programme towards ensuring a pollution-free environment. The speakers in the meeting observed that the present status of air-pollution is rather very serious and urged upon the authority concerned to take measures for checking air-pollution by vehicles, fumes, factory's wastes and other sources.

Some of the discussants suggested publication of leaflets with relevant quotations from the holy Quran and other Books of religion to create public awareness of the importance of keeping a clean and pollution-free environment. One such quotation is: 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness.'

The political parties should abhor them for greater good of the nation. When this is done, only then the political parties can reap the fruits of their popularity.

The opposition and the public

Sir, Like me, the peace-loving people of this country were perturbed to read the statement of political leaders who threatened to go to the streets if their

claims, the salary of a member of British Parliament ranges somewhere above that of a school head teacher and below that of a hospital consultant. It approximately equals the income of a general medical practitioner. Over and above, they have to pay income tax to the maximum tune of 40 per cent of their earnings.

In spite of all these criticisms, the salary of a member of British Parliament ranges somewhere above that of a school head teacher and below that of a hospital consultant.



Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Convention Chaos

THE opening ceremonies of the Republican convention came off smoothly. This was a big relief to the organisers because, with all the various political factions, there could have been chaos. This is what could have happened.

"Wow! Who wins?" "Dole. The film is called 'The Thrill of a GOP Victory and the Agony of a Clinton Defeat.' " "Thanks, Bob. Now let's go to Katie Couric, who is trying to get to Pat Buchanan."

"Do you think Bob Dole is going to win the presidency?" "My prediction is that he will sweep Kansas." "So the polls don't mean a thing?" "Nothing. We still haven't heard from the anti-Hillary voters." "Back to you, Tom." "Thank you, Bryant. Stay tuned for the weightlifting event between Senator Al D'Amato of New York and the liberal Governor William Weld of Massachusetts." "By arrangement with the Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB."

OPINION AIDS: The Role of Media

by Maurice Bloem warmest

HIV/AIDS is a reality for the whole world and especially for the so-called 'developing countries' as concluded once again at the 11th International AIDS conference in Vancouver last July.

Living in Bangladesh, we assume this is still a low prevalence country and this situation will enable us to find the right response in order to avoid a wide-scale spread of the virus (HIV) causing AIDS. During the last few years, several events have happened and actions took place and although not enough, some positive changes and trends can be identified. However, recent articles in the newspapers (indeed, not only The Daily Star) indicate that we have not learned from our own experiences and that of surrounding countries.

For example, in 1992 two Bangladeshi nationals became social outcasts when they were wrongly identified as HIV positive by a newspaper. Their names, address and photographs were printed, and although the final results showed that they were HIV negative, the earlier reports had already done the damage. The same could happen with the persons you named as HIV positive in The Daily Star issues of August 10, 12 and 14 this year.

There are several important issues related to these reports. First, the percentage of false positives (i.e., a test that will give a positive result while the person is in fact HIV negative) will be very high in a low prevalence country. It will go to far to explain here why. Secondly, it is unethical to disclose the HIV positive status of an individual without her/his permission. The Daily Star should have questioned the facts, the medical information of these persons had been disclosed. By whom? With what purpose? Thirdly, given the stigma still attached to HIV/AIDS in this country, it will be impossible for these persons (even if they turn out to be HIV negative) to live a normal life, though a HIV positive person can lead a perfectly normal, productive and meaningful life for another ten years or so. Fourthly, especially in a country like Bangladesh, the media have an important role to play in relation to the prevention of the spread of the virus. To play this role constructively, information should be presented accurately and without sensation.

The Network in Bangladesh prepared a 'Statement of intent' which endorses the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and emphasises the need to respect rights of persons with AIDS, persons who are HIV positive, and persons who are perceived as being at risk for HIV infection. It seems obvious, looking at the recent developments in relation to HIV/AIDS in Bangladesh, that these rights are at stake here.