

Rules of Business

An anomalous void in the basic methodology of running the government in conformity with the parliamentary system we had adopted in 1991 in place of the presidential one, has, at long last, been filled. The Awami League government has taken the earliest opportunity to frame the Rules of Business embodying a new set of essential guidelines for governance based on delineation of authorities and well-defined equations of working relations between the head of state and the head of government on the one hand, and among the prime minister, ministers, state ministers and secretaries to the government on the other. The promptitude with which the government has addressed a seemingly important unfinished agenda — so basic to the functioning of the government itself — earns it our plaudits in a full measure.

At any rate, old habits die hard, specially when these have formed over long spells of presidential rule to harden the attitudes into a mind set. We have seen the continuation of an absurd convention of a multiplicity of petty matter going right up to the chief executive's office since the days of presidential rule. This looking up to the highest authority for everything has to be a matter of the past now.

The new Rules of Business are intended to change the ways in which the affairs of the government have been conducted or run so far. While the prime minister exercises the executive authority of the state, the ministers, state ministers and deputy ministers are empowered not only to oversee but also to direct the workings of their respective ministries. There is hardly any ambiguity about the ministers' powers and responsibilities within their jurisdictions. The secretaries retain their very important roles as the 'administrative head' and the 'principal accounting officers' of the ministries. Basically, the authority of public representatives over appointed officials is sought to be established; but the equations between them are so well-defined that they leave little scope for any adversarial relationship. The Cabinet being collectively responsible to the Jatiya Sangsad, each of its members, including the Prime Minister who heads it, is ordained to act as a team mutually reinforcing each other all the time.

With such onerous responsibilities devolving on the ministers they can no longer fritter away their energy through excessive political work or any hay-wire PR job. They are expected instead to do their home-work well with an unfussy grasp of the agenda before their ministries to be able to deliver the goods. The whole culture of running the government must now change.

Well Done, Home Minister

We commend the home minister for his personal initiative to send an inquiry team to Narayanganj to investigate into the mugging case involving Jahangir Alam, president of the local Jubo League, and his three accomplices. We also express our appreciation for the minister's acknowledgment of our editorial on the subject. The home minister has matched his pronouncements on terrorism with a deed. Although this is a single instance, the appropriate legal action taken against an important party cadre going beyond any partisan political considerations should nonetheless send the right message to any wayward elements within the ruling party as also other parties.

The prime minister's stated policy that terrorists are terrorists no matter which party they belong to, and the home minister's commitment to eliminate terrorism will surely have their credibility greatly enhanced by this act of impartiality. Let this be an example for law enforcing people and partymen alike. As for the home ministry the good work has to be extended to the areas where lawlessness is chronic. In this connection can we ask where Shamim is, who fled immediately after being rounded up from a DU hall by the police?

The campaign against terrorism cannot come to a logical and also desirable conclusion if other ministers, and MPs within or outside of the ruling party, do not extend the necessary backing. Particularly, the ruling party MPs should give whole-hearted support and co-operation to the home minister in this regard. A united and unbiased approach and stand would be the key to success in a drive against terrorism.

Afghan Woes

The Taliban are poised to take over Afghan capital Kabul. Once a rag-tag guerrilla group of young Afghans, it has, ever since the installation of the Kabul government under a UN-brokered deal, been engaged in armed conflicts with it. Bolstered by Pakistan's help, the militia could keep its gradual territorial gains non-negotiable even when armistices were agreed upon between it and the government. Clearly, it has followed a strategy drawn with help from its foreign mentors.

Now what if Kabul falls at the hands of the Taliban? Their inexperience in governance and the militancy to top it off, will be of little help to bring stability in the country. Common Afghan people who have suffered so much since the days of former Soviet-backed regimes are expected to be the worst off. Afghanistan and Somalia are countries that truly represent how the state irreversibly continues to degenerate. The situation is so hopeless that even international bodies, individuals or countries from outside cannot make much of a difference in the doomed fate of such nations.

Afghanistan is going to enter into yet another round of blood-bath, violence, uncertainty and power struggle. There seems to be no end to this pernicious cycle of bloody confrontation for power. Afghanistan's political futility may serve interests of some regional players but that does not rule out at some point in the future the escalation of the conflict beyond the Afghan border. So those who find the turmoil in Kabul politically expedient, may one day be surprised by the snowballing impacts of events in the future. The Soviet Union tried to use Kabul as a frontier for its ideological export. That did not work. Any ploy by others with Kabul is also likely to end up in frustration. Whatever may be the political game or gains for others, the worst sufferer will be the common Afghan people. Let them come forward to determine their own fate in a politically viable manner.

It may sound odd but I found West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu and the Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram echoing the same thoughts on India's unity. They are concerned over the future and want the nation to fight flippant elements. I met them both a few days ago. The Sankaracharya at his request.

"I find less and less Indianness as the days go by," said Jyoti Basu. He recalled how during the discussions on the Almatti Dam over the Krishna in Karnataka — Basu is the convenor of a chief ministers' committee — he bemoaned provincialism. Chief ministers of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka were fighting over their share of water as if they belonged to separate countries. Basu had to remind them that water would remain in India whether it flowed to Karnataka or Andhra Pradesh.

The Sankaracharya was unhappy over tensions and disharmony affecting the sense of integration. "Intellectuals should meet to find ways how to forge unity," he said. "The different parts of India should be strung together more tightly, transcending the demands of home land and regional chauvinism. Intellectuals should build up a national movement to harness the forces of integration."

It was not the Hindutva he talked about. It was straight Indianness, which knew of no particular religion, no particular region, no particular language and no particular caste. How similar did the Sankaracharya and Jyoti Basu sound about nationalism, one consumed by religious thoughts and the other by economic considerations?

There is no doubt that India the two have known is different today. Personal gains have pushed the country's interests into the background. Caste and creed have nearly defeated the spirit of togetherness that once emitted in the various parts of India. Consumerism is prevailing over the renunciatory austerity that has differentiated the Orient from the West.

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Value-based politics is on its last legs. The assembly polls in UP is a case in point. The state has been reduced to a cesspool of individualism and intrigue. Every slogan, however divisive, matters. No method is mean enough if it gives more votes. What kind of legislature will emerge? Even if one party wins, what it would have proved by violating every canon of democracy, which is sought to



Jyoti Basu: "I find less and less Indianness as the days go by."

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

be upheld? Political parties are too immersed in the game of goddi. Some outsiders have to come together to lay down the

rules of functioning. Jyoti Basu said that without morality, politics would reduce to business. That is probably happening. People in high places, when found out, try to split hairs to justify their continuance in public life. The question is not whether the law courts have held them directly or indirectly responsible for mispractices but whether they should stick to their position in the face of doubts cast on their functioning.

This is having a bad effect on the youth. They have no hero because the present-day politicians are too steeped in power politics to be an ideal. Careerism has become the goal because there are no other goals in sight. It is a sad story of a country with spiritual heritage. But when materialism takes over, principles become a casualty. True, without utilising the modern methods which have brought great material advance to some countries of the West, we remain poor — and, what is more, tend to become poorer, because of the pressure of an increasing population. I do not see any way out of our vicious circle of poverty except by utilising the new techniques and sources of power which science has placed at our disposal.

But in doing so we should not forget the basic human element and the fact that our objective is individual improvement and the lessening of inequalities; and we must not forget the ethical and spiritual aspects of life which are ultimately basic to culture and civilisation and which have given some meaning to life.

It must be remembered that it is not by some magic adoption of specialist or capitalist method that poverty suddenly leads to riches. The only way is through hard work, by increasing the productivity of the nation and organising an equitable distribution of its products. It is a lengthy and difficult process. But it is the only one which can avoid conflict and confrontation.

Indeed, real social progress will come only when an opportunity is given to the individual to develop, provided the 'individual' is not a selected group but comprises the whole community. The touchstone should be how far any political or social theory enables the individual to rise above his petty self and think in terms of the good of all.

In a sense, every country, whether it is capitalist, socialist or communist, accepts the ideal of a welfare state. Capitalism, in a few countries at least, has achieved this common welfare to a very large extent, though it is far from having solved its own problems and there is a basic lack of something vital. Democracy, allied to capitalism, has undoubtedly toned down any of its evils and, in fact, is different now from what it was a generation or two ago.

It is often said that there is a sense of frustration and depression in India. The old buoyancy of spirit is not to be found at a time when enthusiasm and hard work are most needed. This is not merely in evidence in our country. It is, in a sense, a world phenomenon. In our efforts to insure material prosperity, we have not paid any attention to the spiritual element in human nature.

We talk of a welfare state and of democracy and socialism. They are good concepts, but they hardly convey a clear and un-

ambiguous meaning. Democracy and socialism are means to an end, not the end itself. We talk of the good of society. Is this something apart from and transcending the good of the individuals comprising it? If the individual is ignored and sacrificed for what is considered the good of society, is that the right objective to have?

The moral aspect of development is also central in the thought of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. India's great leaders since independence in 1947, India has been involved in the largest experiment in democracy that has ever been tried. But the success or failure of democracy in India will depend on how far it is able to save its heritage, while building the society economically.

In considering the economic aspects of our problems, we have always to remember the basic approach of peaceful means; perhaps we might also keep in view the old Vedantic ideal of the life-force which is the inner base of everything that exists.

The problems that India faces are common to other countries, but — much more so — there are new problems for which we have not got parallels or historical precedents elsewhere. What has happened in the past in the industrially advanced countries has little bearing on us today. Western economies, though helpful, have little bearing on our present-day problems. So, also have Marxist economics, even though they throw a considerable light on economic processes, which are in many ways out of date. We thus have to do our own thinking.

India is not a place or a nationality but a state of being. Here Blake's 'dread forms of certainty' melt away. Certainties are lost, rather than found. It is a pity that such an enigmatic land has been captured by corrupt politicians and dishonest public servants. Both Sankaracharya and Jyoti Basu are hoping that morality will return to politics one day. Let's keep our fingers crossed.

Meet Domestic Demands First

by Dr Shafi A Khaled

As we peer into the future, we must understand that all Asian, African, South American and former East European nations are going for the same limited Western European and North American markets. Slowly, but surely, international trade of low value-added finished products will be traded in an even stronger buyers' market than it is already. Here lies the possible paradox of the future: Countries industrialising en masse for foreign markets may be on a self-defeating fast-track.

Now, as we step back into the past we see that, unlike Taiwan, the fundamentals of a market economy were not honoured by some of the central and South American nations. Thus, international banks repeatedly rescheduled debts owed by nations such as Brazil — US\$117 Billion in 1991. In Central and South America, industrialisation came into a world where, essentially, the powers that be were strongly feudalistic. They focused largely on the supply-side: setting up factories, constructing buildings, roads, hospitals, universities and new

capitals, while ignoring the need to have a robust demand-side. Development by import substitution was the name of the game. Import substitution means producing domestically what was so long being imported. As a contrast, the economic breakthrough via garment industries in Bangladesh may be termed as industrialisation via export orientation. The country is now exporting more and more of non-traditional goods, instead of jute and tea. In the Brazilian case, for example, labour use was discouraged by various means. Attempt to copy the Western economic model as it then stood was the goal. Perhaps other explanations as to why this approach was taken exists. Perhaps class orientation, paternalism, greed, pure ignorance, or the glamour of dazzling new equipments made the businessmen and policy setters feel that people depended on them; they did not need them and, definitely, they owed them very little.

Thus, the ordinary worker and his family were not adequately empowered via literacy

drive or decent wages in stable jobs. Farm products had depressed price relative to that of industrial products (reminds one of the Scissors Crisis faced by the former Soviet Union); industrial prices going up the chart while agricultural prices rapidly declined; and opportunities to utilize their native talents were not tapped. So, the new products did not have adequate domestic demand. Even then, compared with other economies following the same policy, Brazil was more successful because of its relatively bigger internal market. Besides owing to import substitution policy, unlike Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong, these countries had not geared their economies to export to North America and Western Europe. Thus, they were effectively blocked from earning adequate returns on their investments, both domestically and abroad.

No wonder their creditors had no choice but to offer revised and softer terms on outstanding loans. They could not

write-off US\$320 billions plus (owed at that time by Central and South American nations) without bringing the Western banking system crashing down. Old forms of ownership in land alone with traditional productivity had to be substituted for new forms of ownership in industrial and service sectors. A major attitudinal change was needed. The returns on industrialisation could far exceed that on old-fashioned land ownership.

However, without relaxing feudal mentality the potential bonanza could not be earned. Unfortunately, those responsible were not ready to do the needful. The prominent economic theory of the time (the trickle down effect suggested by Nobel Laureate Sir Arthur Lewis in his Dual Economic Theory) prevented any change in values and attitudes among civil servants, military personnel and the elite, urban business community. In fact, in a similar vein, I may suggest that had the South prevailed in the US Civil War, the southern Confederacy would now have an economic status similar to that of Mexico. Today, countless illegal Anglo-Saxon immigrants could very well be flocking north to the states of then vanquished Lincoln's Union.

This brings up the question, "Who should be affected by economic development?" The closest correct answer is, "The vast

majority of the people — the common people." There is a symbiotic relationship between investors and their customers. They survive and progress together. Directly or indirectly, the employees are also their customers. Just as Brazil ignored its employees to its peril, so can other countries. The domestic market is the best market to have. It is known, more predictable and typically larger than any foreign market. Ultimately, improving product quality for domestic customers will increase the chances of success abroad. Also, marketing and pricing strategies may be more easily mastered domestically before employing them abroad.

Most developed countries domestic before they went abroad. Of all major companies, perhaps only Honda of Japan, realizing that it could not sell its cars in Japan, planned almost entirely for the US market. The Electrolux company of Sweden has expanded its production and market base by acquiring other firms all over Europe. Its Scandinavian market-base was too small to exploit economies of scale. Bridgestone, the Japanese tyre and rubber products company has done likewise by acquiring competing firms (for example, Firestone) worldwide. Since Toyota, Nissan and other car manufacturers had opened plants in the US Bridgestone wanted to continue supplying these companies with tyres.

Shipping tyres from Japan becomes costly. So, they decided to manufacture abroad, closer to new Japanese car plants. There are many companies like Electrolux and Bridgestone.

However, they have all geared towards the foreign market after gaining power in a robust domestic economy. It is difficult to find companies like Honda in developed countries, that have produced exclusively for foreign consumption. The promise of today's India lies to a large measure in how its industrialists have tapped the domestic market via import substitution industrialisation. Today, India's home bred companies may modernise quickly by collaborating with foreign investors. They may then export much more effectively than grafted industries set up specifically for that purpose alone. In other words, their share of value-addition is likely to be much greater. The same may not be said of all other developing economies. Even if the Indian industrialists do badly abroad, their stability is assured largely by their prior domestic presence. Thus, while international trade will be the key to accumulating precious resources by the domestic investors, the long run importance of producing for domestic consumption must not be overlooked.

Moral: For economic development, expanding international trade is great; expanding domestic sale is even better.

BRAC replies

Sir, Mr Lutful Quadir, in his letter, entitled "BRAC" dated September 24, had mentioned some commonly held misconceptions that need to be removed.

Mr. Quadir is worried that BRAC, being associated with Delta Life and Green Delta Insurance Companies in a private housing finance venture, is "deviating from the very goal for which it was created". BRAC now has a staff of 17,000 full-time employees and 34,000 locally recruited programme functionaries in 700 field offices all over the country. BRAC is conscious that these modestly paid workers need support to have their own homes. BRAC approached the donor agencies and received a grant of Tk 9 crore for financing housing for its staff at subsidised rates of interest. When the opportunity came to sponsor a housing finance project with Delta Life and Green Delta, BRAC saw the opportunity of playing a role in making housing easier to other low and middle income people who presently have no access to institutional finance for housing. BRAC has been providing housing loans to the rural poor for quite some time with satisfactory results. So far it has disbursed Tk 32.72 crore for this purpose.

Mr. Quadir has expressed his concern about BRAC's participation in commercial ventures. He must understand that such participation has dual purpose. Firstly, BRAC ploughs back the profits from these ventures into the funds meant for the poor. Secondly, these profits reduce BRAC's financial dependence on foreign donors and help in making the organisation increasingly self-reliant. As a result, BRAC today is 44 per cent self-financed. It has a printing press, a cold storage, two garment factories as its commercial ventures and is now setting up a milk processing plant. BRAC's chain of Aarong shops employs 30 thousand rural producers whose products are having a burgeoning local and export sales. Aarong has indeed

become a resounding success. BRAC's commercial ventures are not in anyway deviating from its goal of poverty alleviation but that these are strengthening the organisation financially so that it may pursue that objective more vigorously.

Mr. Quadir has mentioned about a BRAC building in Mohakhali. As a matter of fact, BRAC has constructed two multi-stored buildings in Mohakhali, one to be called "BRAC Centre" — housing its head office and the other, "Aarong Bhaban" housing — Aarong's central and ancillary services. Parts of these two 20-storey buildings will be rented out commercially to generate income. To clear another of Mr. Quadir's misconception, these buildings belong to BRAC as an organisation and neither Mrs. Abed nor any other individual has anything to do with its ownership.

BRAC believes that poverty alleviation cannot be achieved through piecemeal approach. This challenge calls for all-out efforts and has to be met in a sustained manner, boldly and imaginatively. Over 17 lakh landless poor families are covered by its rural development programme, one core twenty lakh people under health programme and 12 lakh poor children are studying in its 34,000 schools. Therefore, in addition to these programmes, it has other supporting departments like research and evaluation, training for capacity-building of its staff and the rural poor, monitoring, material development and publications, audit and accounts, a computer centre and the like. Running such a vast organisation efficiently and effectively requires advanced infrastructural set up and modern management techniques and we believe that these two buildings will serve both BRAC and its marketing enterprise, Aarong, well into the next century.

BRAC is a poverty-focused organisation and it can have no pretensions of a 'parallel government'. Throughout its existence BRAC has tried to support national efforts in eradicating poverty including provision of education and health-care to the deprived sections of the society. BRAC, which receives some financial support from the government, has the privilege of jointly executing with it national development programmes. As a responsible organisation BRAC is accountable not only its own board of governors but also to the donors and the government of Bangladesh. BRAC's accounts, which are audited by independent auditors appointed by the board, are also audited separately by the auditors appointed by the donors. Its annual reports and accounts are published regularly and circulated widely.

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Parliamentary exploitation must stop

Sir, I am very impressed by the letter of Mr Ahmedul Alam entitled, "Time for Constitutional Activists" on September 16, 1996. He is quite correct in saying that "... it is about time that the constitutional activists start acting so that JS members cannot pass bills for their own benefits alone in the name of total consensus or so." This is very unfortunate that politician who tell people to give them opportunity to serve the nation by electing them, afterwards help to make discriminatory law without any hesitation which is beneficial only for them and not for the people.

In my opinion, 4-wheel cars, jeeps, station wagons, which were proposed as tax-free by the Jatiya Party government and pension for the JS members proposed by BNP government and afterwards, unanimously accepted by the opposition parties are quite discriminatory and should be canceled. This kind of proposal is nothing but bribery. This must not repeat.

Mahboob Hossain, PhD, 19, Zigatola, Dhaka.

In Memoriam: Lulu Bilquis Banu

Fall of a Luminary, More Widely Known Abroad than at Home

by M M Rezaul Karim



LULU Bilquis Banu is no more. She breathed her last in London Saturday night following a protracted illness. Countless people, specially Bangladeshis in London, will mourn her death deeply.

An eminent educationist, keen social worker, energetic political activist and, above all, a great humanitarian, this doyen of Bangladeshi ladies in London left an indelible mark in the hearts of all who had the opportunity to know or hear about her. The ostensible reason for her prolonged stay in London, following separation from her husband the late Ambassador and Barrister, Ahmed Kamal, was to rear her two young daughters, who have now turned out to be pretty as well as influential faces in the London financial domain.

In reality, her life was nothing but a long saga of dedication for the cause of the right and the needy. Heavy odds and immense sufferings never daunted the indomitable spirit of this frail and, later, physically handicapped lady. She was laudatory for those who had done good. But silently hoped that the mistaken would rectify his or her mistake. She spoke no ill of anyone, even if the latter had committed the gravest of follies. Her ever-helpful attitude to anyone under any situation was the most adorable trait of her character.

Lulu Bilquis Banu's contribution to the liberation struggle of Bangladesh was enormous.

She was an important catalyst in organising Bangladeshis, specially intellectuals, as well as foreigners in active support of the movement. It was under her presidency that the historic meeting in Coventry on the 24th April, 1971 organised by the Bangladesh Action Committees all over the UK, decided to establish a central body to guide the liberation movement not only in the UK but all over Europe.

I personally was heavily indebted to this noble lady. She was one of the very few, as a favourite Headmistress of my wife at the Vignarunessa School, with whom I, as a

Counsellor of the then Pakistan High Commission in London, could confide and share our untold agony following the military crackdown of the 25th March. It was she who brought me in contact, during the early days of our liberation war, with the Special Overseas Representative of the Mujibnagar government and the founder of the unofficial Bangladesh Mission in London, the late Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury whom I had the pleasure and distinction of serving subsequently as his Deputy.

It was only last week when I received a call from Lulu Apa. She asked me to send to her a maid to look after her in place of the one I had sent her a few years ago with the special permission of my erstwhile British counterpart in Dhaka, High Commissioner Peter Fowler. She told me that the maid could have been reassured that she might not be required to attend to her for too long. I was shocked but became painfully silent, knowing quite well her hopeless condition as I had witnessed during my last visit to her in July 1995. I did foresee then how prophetic were these pronouncements of the noble soul and a granddaughter of Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Haq.

Lulu Bilquis Banu will be missed not only by her near and dear ones, but by all those, both at home and abroad, who had the privilege of coming in contact with her, directly or indirectly.