

Pakistan's Trial

On November 5 democracy took another beating in the subcontinent. The ouster in Pakistan of Benazir Bhutto and her government will specially hurt the lovers, aspirants and practitioners of parliamentary democracy.

We want Pakistan to recover from this and hence we pray for the success of the general election promised in only four months' time. We are not yet ready to forget the Pakistani genocide and that is more the reason for us to wish Pakistan graduate to democracy the soonest it can in the surest way possible.

Shall we blame the backstep on president Leghari? Who is Leghari to be able to call such an impossible shot? He is nothing if not representing the exasperation of that nation with the limitlessly irresponsible way Benazir and her spouse have been known to be abusing state power.

There are many enemies of democracy but none so insidious as that comes in a democratic garb. We say this because we know.

Congrats Mr. Clinton

The White House remains unchanged. Mr. William Clinton has been retained by the people of the United States as the President for second term. Despite an over-exposed and rather monotonously predictable victory, Mr Clinton deserves special congratulations for being the second Democrat US President to be returned to the office for a second time since Franklin Roosevelt in 1944.

Now that Mr Clinton has been re-elected, he will have all the time in the world to carry on with his plans and programmes aimed at the welfare of American people on the basis of the confidence shown in him. One hopes, he will display the same zeal in upholding America's positive leadership in global politics and the new economic order.

One of the luminous chapters of American involvement in international politics during Clinton's presidency was the restoration of normalcy of sorts in the bleeding Balkans. Without Mr. Clinton's initiative to broker peace in the turbulent Bosnia-Herzegovina, the humanity would have experienced sacrilege of even a greater proportion. The policy of a re-elected Clinton is expected to follow a path of similar assertion for the cause of peace in the Middle East. Mr Clinton would be wistfully looked at for a more humane approach to the long-suffering Iraqi people.

In the global context of expectations, the plight of LDCs ought to feature prominently in his working plans. A major source of optimism for us in Bangladesh stems from his interest in Grameen Bank and all that it stands for.

In a unipolar world, the role of an American president is of great importance. It may not always touch us, but for a world almost incredibly changed in the last few years, the positive assertion of an American president will continue to be felt unfailingly.

DSE Needs Safer Haven

The Dhaka Stock Exchange building at 9F Motijheel C/A has been declared unsafe. The RAJUK has asked members of the public not to crowd in there. For that would make the building more unsafe. The warning comes not a day too soon and fortunately before any untoward turn of event occurring there. We welcome the caution.

It will be foolish to stop at merely sounding the alarm because an invitation to get rich instantly is hard to resist even if it entails risk to life. How to make people heed the warning?

The RAJUK, at the end of their investigation, has asked the DSE to ensure the safety of their accommodation. Is that possible? Who will guarantee that efforts of bolstering the building will not be offset by the pressure of tens of thousands trudging every inch of the seven-storey house built in early sixties not to take even the load of hundreds?

Let us dare what RAJUK hasn't and ask DSE to move to a temporary and yet sturdier accommodation — one that will not create unmanageable traffic problems in the bargain. This is to say till the DSE doesn't build its own nest according to its own specific needs bettering say, the City in London or Le Bourne in Paris.

The move to temporary accommodation must be done on a very very urgent basis. At stake is lives of who knows how many.

What Did November 7 Portend?

Zia's instructions were meticulously carried out soon after the breaking of dawn. The aftermath of the day was, however, another episode

THE Revolution and Solidarity Day has been celebrated as a national holiday on November 7 since its first anniversary in 1976 throughout Bangladesh and in our diplomatic missions abroad. A brief analysis of the events preceding this day in 1975 will perhaps help comprehend the real significance of the day. Following the tragic events of the 15th August 1975, the self-confessed perpetrators of the crime, the Majors as they were called in common parlance, saddled themselves in Bangladesh with their storm troopers of the Armoured Corps in an impregnable posture. They made Khandakar Mosharraf Ahmad as President, appointed General M. A. G. Osmany, Commander in Chief of the Liberation Army as Defence Adviser, included many of Bangabandhu's cabinet ministers as ministers of the new cabinet, promoted General

Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim



Ziaur Rahman as Chief of the Army Staff, and took upon themselves, without holding any official position, the overall responsibility of running, rather ruling, the country. A section of the Army officers grew gradually exasperated at the writ issued by the Majors in Bangladesh and were no longer agreeable to obey the dictates of the junior rebels. They became eager to bring the Majors back into the hierarchy in the cantonment. According to some, they indirectly approached the Chief of Army Staff, General Ziaur Rahman, but received no positive indication. Again, some of the officers viewed the 15th August incident as having gone too far beyond the need for restoration of democracy. They were encouraged by witnessing a pro-Mujib procession taken out in the street.

In the early hours of the morning of the 3rd November 1975 some of the officers in the cantonment, under the leadership of the Chief of General Staff, Khaled Mosharraf, organised themselves to discipline the Majors and to bring them by

simmering discontent pervading the bulk of the Armed Forces due to the sudden removal of the Chief of Army Staff, Ziaur Rahman, in a highhanded manner followed by his house arrest. It was not merely an act which resulted in breaking the chain of command and army discipline that caused great worry among soldiers. But, since the fall of Shaikh Mujib, the Armed Forces were in the process of regaining its dignity and self confidence. Many of the armed forces personnel after the events of the 3rd November, became apprehensive about their retention of the newly achieved power and facilities.

It was, again, in the early hours of the morning of the 7th November that the troops gathered together, freed the interned Chief of Army Staff, General Zia, and set out in the streets outside the cantonment. Colonel Taher, a valiant freedom fighter, who turned into a leader of a political movement advocating equality of people and ranks, was an important catalyst in effecting an almost spontaneous revolution and

gaining solidarity with the people through a general mass uprising. As the soldiers came out of the cantonment, people poured out in the street in large numbers to rejoice in their common victory.

I had a bit of personal experience on the 7th night. I was then assigned as a Director General in the Foreign Office. I received call from General Zia a little before 5 o'clock in the morning. I had known Zia since 1966 when he was a young Captain and an instructor in the Pakistan Military Academy. I went to Abbottabad and Kakul on a furlough from New York where I was then posted. I also met Khaled Mosharraf, who was also a colleague of Zia. Since then an amount of friendship grew with both.

A call from a captive General Zia amidst the thundering but uncertain noises in the streets outside, startled me to no end. I

first expressed satisfaction that he was free and well. He told me that the Foreign Ministry should call Heads of some diplomatic missions and assure them that the spontaneous uprising of soldiers and civilians was crowned with success, that the soldiers were celebrating their victory by firing in the air and that there was nothing to worry.

Zia possibly knew few Foreign Office officials closely at that time and perhaps my telephone number was at hand. He had special instructions for the Indian High Commissioner, Samar Sen, though he said that the Indian Envoy should be conveyed that Bangladeshis wanted 'most favoured nation's treatment with India'. I had the audacity of correcting the future President, saying what he meant was 'good neighbourly relations with India' to which he readily agreed, laughingly adding, 'you diplomats choose your own language'. Zia's instructions were meticulously carried out soon after the breaking of dawn. The aftermath of the day was, however, another episode.

To the Editors

'Bangabandhu Museum: Mirror of History'— a Clarification

Sir, It has come to our notice that Mr. Abu Sayeed while presenting a delightful feature 'Bangabandhu Museum: Mirror of History', Published in The Daily Star Magazine of November 1, '96 inadvertently committed a factual error. We would like to point out to the writer that late President Ziaur Rahman did not hand over Bangabandhu Bhaban to Sheikh Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana. The truth is that despite repeated requests made by the daughters of Bangabandhu to allow them to hold Milad Mehfil in Bangabandhu Bhaban, late President Ziaur Rahman did not grant permission to do so as long as he lived. It is only after his death that the authorities concerned handed over the keys of Bangabandhu Bhaban to Sheikh Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana on 12 June, 1981.

Prof. Abu Sayeed, Information and Research Secretary Bangladesh Awami League

HSS fiasco: Some observations

Sir, The recently published results of this year's HSC exams have shocked everyone. The low pass-percentage was due to poor performance of the examinees in English in general.

A large number of students, belonging to all the three groups, have flunked in English which is a compulsory subject. This has been attributed to the dependency of students on notes, suggestions and extensive coaching. But an in-depth look into the matter will reveal some other facts.

This year's HSC English question was much different from those of the previous years. The examinees found an essay of 20 marks, a paragraph carrying 10 marks and a personal letter/application of 10 marks 'uncommon'. In the book portion as well, a number of narrative questions, short questions and explanations were 'uncommon'. The aim of such types of questions is to judge the analytical ability of the students. But in practice students are prone to memorise answers of some selected questions and they expect identical question to be set for the exams. When this doesn't happen they are almost unable to produce something on their own. For this reason a good number of 'uncommon' questions in this year's exams took a heavy toll on them.

The poor analytical ability of the students has its origin in ten years of schooling and not in two years of study in college alone. In the schools the teachers cut corners when it comes to teaching grammar. The textbooks are written in such a way as to avoid introduction of new words and phrases as much as possible. Consequently the stu-

dents neither learn the basics of grammar nor they can enrich their vocabulary. They just procure notes and memorise them like a parrot. This has been going on for years!

I think that 'before resorting to any unconventional way of setting questions for the exams, the authorities concerned should upgrade the text books and the method of teaching and provide the schools with efficient teachers. We should not solely blame the college teachers. After all they cannot do miracle in mere two years.

Ahmed Zamil, Level 1, CE, BUET

Government publications

Sir, The Department of Films and Publications of the government is responsible for all the government publications. It used to regularly publish, distribute and sell four journals/newsletters namely Sachitra Bangladesh (fortnightly) in Bangla, Bangladesh Quarterly in English, Nabaran (monthly), in Bangla and Bangladesh Fortnightly in English. Surprisingly after June last, publication of all regular government magazines/newsletters have been kept in abeyance. Only permission was given to publish Bangladesh Quarterly's September 96 issue as a very special case. The publication of Bangladesh Fortnightly has been abandoned and not replaced by any other newsletter. We talk of high-sounding philosophies about children's rights, desire, welfare etc. But it will be unfortunate to note that the only government publication exclusively for children in Bangla named Nabaran is not coming out for several months which was a piece of great pleasure and pride to our children for many years.

The most popular and widely-adorned Sachitra Bangladesh (fortnightly) has also ceased publication for several months. It had been being published regularly after independence. This Bangla journal had wide coverage of national and international topics with pictorials, articles on economic developments with informative data, diagrams, tables, socio-cultural and literary feature of various interests, short stories, reminiscence, poems, tit-bits on health, romance, jokes etc. In fact it could cater the interests of readers with different tastes and temperaments. Besides it was a vehicle for giving encouragement to our young and budding writers, poets, essayists, critics in Bangla literary pursuits.

At present, however, there is no regular government publication of magazine or newsletter in the country despite sanctioned manpower with necessary budget allocation for such regular publications. Will the authorities in the top kindly look into the affairs of Dept of

Films and Publications so that the journals resume publication soon?

Abdul Ali, Nirban Kutir, South Mugdipara, Dhaka

Can we clean up the mess?

Sir, Is Dhaka turning into a megacity in future? In accordance with some newspapers it's turning to a megastatus in the years to come which will be published a few days ago. As of now, traffic jam, digging canals, sprawling garbage, contaminated water supply, water logging — all these making the city a mess. Whenever we go outside the home it is needed to use a handkerchief from the nose owing to malodorous from the rotting garbage, we have to jump over the road due to digging canals by the wayside, we can fall down in water at any moment when our rickshaw's wheel falls in a hole underwater of the road, we can't our reach our destination in time due to unbearable traffic jam. This is a common picture of everyday life in Dhaka.

We know that rotting garbage spread malaria, filaria, viral fevers, diarrhoea, dysentery, cholera, gastroenteritis, amoebiasis, poliomyelitis and enteric pathogens. Most of the city-dwellers receive pipe water which is contaminated. Infective agents that contaminated water contains include viruses which cause hepatitis (jaundice) and poliomyelitis and bacteria that cause cholera, typhoid and bacillary dysentery. In Dhaka city, sewage and water pipes are lined next to each other. When leakages occur, the water is often contaminated. Conversely contaminated water, when it comes in contact with organic waste, brings new germ larvae to breed there. Stagnant sewage is a breeding ground for Culex mosquitoes which carry malaria and filaria germs. Untreated garbage and sewage from the city flows into rivers, causing pollution, affecting humans and wildlife alike. So it's needless to say we are going to face a dreadful future unless taking strong measures right now. But certainly by generating collected garbage we can form gas which is usable according to our experts.

A few days ago The Daily Star had started a photo campaign — 'Have seen it Mr Mayor?' But it didn't solve the problems. I would like to draw attention of the city corporation and other authorities concerned that an expeditiously as it is possible they will take strong measures to remove the heap of these problems to make Dhaka a healthy city in future and bring back the peace to the city-dwellers.

Shahrukh Sohel, C/O N. Hassan, No. 194/A, Road No. 5, Mohammadia Housing Limited

Neither Local Nor Government

Today in the independent and democratic People's Republic of Bangladesh the local government at thana level should imply substantial development responsibility to the thana council with commensurate authority to generate own resources for the purpose and/or an inherent right to secure the predetermined share of resources from the national exchequer.

LOCAL government has been adored, abandoned and abused since its introduction in our part of the world early in this century. During its earliest phase, it used to be called Local Self Government as opposed to total government or self-rule. It was the days of the British Raj. The distinction was necessary. Since August 1947, the word 'self' has obviously been dropped. However it became local government only in name. It was and has never been a government. Therefore, whether it is local or not does not mean anything. Giving authority over a bunch of choudkiders or providing doles or works programme grants do not by any chance create any local government institution. The history of local government in Bangladesh is an endless story of greed, corruption and intrigue. The Union Council and Thana Parishads were abused rather than put to any beneficial use. The District Council in independent Bangladesh remained a unique ghost so far. It was never revived for reasons which call for serious analysis. The quarter-century history of inaction must be told.

Boards, from limited revenue earnings managed rural roads, bridges, ferry ghats, hats and bazars in a very rudimentary fashion. The infrastructure was primitive and the scope for local government activities were marginal at best. The Municipalities were a different story. The need for urban led the Municipalities to develop their own programmes utilities such as water supply network, generation and distribution of electricity etc. It may be noted that Dhaka Water Supply was originally owned and operated by the Municipalities and Dhaka Electricity Supply was a private enterprise and the Municipality had a share in it. There was no WASA or DESA. For strange reasons, Provincial Government took over them instead of strengthening local bodies or private enterprises.

The system continued as it is for quite sometime even after the British left in 1947. The government in the 1950s was enormously concerned (and rightly so) with the setting up of the national administrative networks, systems and organisations. Local Government in need for the word 'Self' in-between institutions did not

ment system. Therefore in spite of significant development role of local bodies in the 1960s, the basic character of being neither local nor government persisted throughout the period.

During 1970s, it appeared that the Central Government was prepared to share responsibilities of development with local bodies only at the Union level but the authority remained confined to the central government. The concept of thana council was thrown out of the sixth floor window of the Ministry of LGRD since the influence of the elected MP to allocate works programme, wheat or cash and other public goods could not be shared with an elected local body. Frankly speaking, the role of the local government system had never been appreciated until the present government did so only this year, a quarter century later. Better later than never, although the conflicts of interest at local level between members of parliament and directly elected chairperson of thana parishads have yet to be resolved. Such conflicts of interest tend to degenerate into a war of interests if the chairman of district councils are also di-



Window on Asia

The recent initiative of the government to reintroduce local government, at several levels, all over the country is indeed a welcome development. But it must not be a repetition of what we had in the past. It must be a genuine government with adequate lawful authority at the local level and (most important) distinct from the central government bureaucracy reaching down to the thana level. The most significant departure will be to set up local government which will co-exist and fully complement the Central Government. Therefore if Central Government functionaries also become a part and parcel of the local government bureaucracy, then the distinction and separate co-existence of the two governments would vanish. It would then remain neither local nor a separate government by any definition. An extended version of the Central bureaucracy, supported by locally elected functionaries is not a local government. It must be clearly understood.

The local self government bodies consisting of Union Boards and District Boards as well as Municipalities for urban areas were set up very early in this century, so that colonial rulers could project the myopic image of a benign government. Also in the process, the liberals thought, prepare the natives to achieve in the long run, some form of self-rule keeping intact the overlordship of the British Raj.

Under these circumstances, the functions and responsibilities on the one hand and the authority on the other of the local boards were extremely limited or hardly anything at all. The overall concern of the colonial administration was three-fold: i) maintenance of law and order; ii) administration of justice; and iii) collection of revenue. Development was not the name of the game. The choudkiders belonging to the Union Boards were important to thana police while District

worry them too much. The first military government of 1958 revamped the local government system, setting up local bodies at union, thana, district and at division levels. It became a four-tier local institutional infrastructure for the ostensible purpose of promoting local development. No doubt there were widespread developments of the physical infrastructure in the 1960s with rapid expansion of rural roads, thana irrigation programme, thana training and development centres, schools and hospitals.

As administrative unit of the Provincial government quickly developed at the thana level and thana became the focus of rural development. Basically, what came into being and was expanded provincial government whose officials became the functionaries for local development through elected local bodies.

Today in the independent and democratic People's Republic of Bangladesh the local government at thana level should imply substantial development responsibility to the thana council with commensurate authority to generate own resources for the purpose and/or an inherent right to secure the predetermined share of resources from the national exchequer. At the same time, the officials responsible to carry out the development task would not only work for the thana council, they should be appointees of the thana council as well. The local bodies must have their very own capacity to plan and implement project. This was never the case. Hence there was no local government in the true sense of the term. The Ayub Shahi District Councils remained the hangover from British days. The Union Councils had no doubt been rejuvenated through rural works programme but political role of the so-called Basic Democrats vitiated the prospects for the emergence of a solid local govern-

ment system. Therefore in spite of significant development role of local bodies in the 1960s, the basic character of being neither local nor government persisted throughout the period.

The attempt by former president Ershad to revamp the local government system was basically geared to expand the role of the Central Government at the local level. Administrative decentralisation is not the same as strengthening local government.

The present discussions and articles by experts on the subject seem to be ignoring these basic considerations. If the objective is to persist with the basic character of 'neither local nor government', then it is useful to look into the organisational details, including future structure of local bodies. But if the objective is to establish local governments, then the basic issue is the share of authority and responsibility between Local Governments on the one hand and the Central Government on the other. Mayor Hanif cannot be made responsible for a clean Dhaka so long WASA and RAJUK constitute no part of the city government. In fact, it is then no city government at all.

'Neither local nor government' will obviously frustrate the commitment already made by the government. Respective roles of the Central Government vis-a-vis Local Government should be identified first. A country of 120 million cannot be managed by one Central Government alone, regardless of the fact that the total land area is limited to 55,000 square miles only. Vibrant city government of Dhaka or Zilla parishad of Panchagarh or Teknaf Thana parishad are significantly important if we propose to become the emerging tiger in the early 21st century.

OPINION

"Restructuring BCS Administrative Cadre"

Kazi Golam Tousif

The article published in your esteemed daily titled 'Restructuring BCS Administrative Cadre' (it ought to be Administrative Service), by Hedayet Ahmed on 12 October, 1996 was very stimulating. As a Government servant, I read Hedayet Ahmed's article with great enthusiasm. The article has proved beneficial for me. I understood that Hedayet Ahmed who is a member of erstwhile CSP cadre, did not understand why he has shown grave concern for BCS Administrative Service. The initiative might be 'restructuring' the image of BCS Administrative Service, though one is not sure whether BCS Administrative Service is suffering from any image problem.

He has discussed many pertinent issues including the revision of the Rules of Business with the topic. The government has recently revised the Rules of Business to facilitate the relationship between bureaucracy and political leadership in the parliamentary system. But I failed to find any substantive for bringing the issue of Rules of Business in the article. In his discussion the origin of administrative structure in the subcontinent, which includes Bangladesh, too, the writer has prudently defined the cause behind setting up of administrative structure while saying: 'In the days of colonial rule government was primarily concerned with the maintenance of law and order for the sake of stability, and collection of revenues and taxes and levies to sustain its administrative machinery'. He traced the post colonial (Pakistan) era as experiencing a shift in the philosophy of state as governments be-

came increasingly involved in welfare activities. Then he comes to the present context of 'free market economy when government control over economic and development activities is being liberalised'. The role of the government is becoming that of a facilitator rather than a prime mover.

It is true that in the post-Soviet age the world is adhering to the capitalist philosophy, conferring momentum on private sector rather than public sector. The impetus of private sector dictates the main function of state as a facilitator to the business people. As a result there is a widely-reached consensus among the people all over the world that the bureaucrats should learn to think themselves as servants of the people. Some countries are even thinking to introduce regular appraisal system for the government servants, called Performance Appraisal. Keeping all this in mind, one can intrinsically ask the writer that why he is suggesting to restructure the Administrative Service when the State's function, according to him, is to facilitate, not to govern?

The writer contends that 'Bangladesh, upon independence inherited an obsolete structure members of which came through a rigorous selection process, underwent extensive training and moved up the ladder after duly meeting the necessary evaluation criteria'. Fine, but what is so special about it? Civil Servants are chosen in a strict selection process and trained up very extensively to execute state functions everywhere in the world, not to mention the then Pakistan. I

am sure he does not intend to say that it has become 'easy nowadays in Bangladesh to get into the flock of civil servants (last time some 65 thousand candidates appeared in the 15th BCS examination, out of whom only 783 were successful; the ratio stands at 83:1).

The main contention of the write-up is that during the tenure of Gen. Ziaur Rahman, the then Establishment Minister Majidul Hoque disbanded the higher administrative cadre of the civil service and merged it with a number of subordinate services thereby eroding its most important feature of competence and quality. The result is: BCS (Adm.) is not being able to attract the best available talents from amongst the eligible candidates now. The empirical foundation of the article lies in this statement. For that I read this part with attention but failed to agree with him. Majidul Hoque introduced many reforms in the civil service, though it is beyond my understanding whether, a) any such service was disbanded, or, b) such action affected the BCS Administrative Service, in the said period.

I don't know on what basis he could say that the best boys are not going to the BCS Administrative Service, where they (the talented boys) used to go in the past, especially during the Pakistan period. He might have in his hand some interesting report from the Public Service Commission as a source of such observation. The writer is an assistant accountant general at the Audit and Accounts Training Academy, Segunbagicha, Dhaka.