

History Needs Periodic Corrections

Government that Works

Enamoured of the excellent ideas generated by the inaugural day of the two-day workshop on "Government that Works: Public Sector Management Reforms"...

It is in the presentation of M S Meiko Nishimizu, Country Director of South Asian Region of the World Bank that we find a detailed recipe for effective, accountable and transparent governance in the country...

The administrative philosophy is based on avoidance of mistakes with the result that application of common sense is regarded as risky, let alone innovative and creative try-outs which are even more ruthlessly discouraged...

Waste Recycling

Waste is ubiquitous. It is congenitally linked with human existence and evolution. In an ideal situation man's education, vision and world-view are expected to take care of waste before it becomes a deadening weight upon himself...

Once again the want of vision on the part of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is gallingly exposed. Its concern about solid waste management shows appalling inadequacy as the belatedness of its involving a Japanese firm in a self-feasibility test for waste recycling...

Makes Sense

Communications Minister Anwar Hossain has made two points on traffic congestion which attract attention for not being run-of-the-mill type: it better be called 'traffic anarchy' rather than a jam and the problem has become serious enough to be frowned at by foreign investors...

Dhaka's uniquely riotous traffic is topped off by the rare stigma it has earned as emitting the densest of lead pollution among the world cities. Between the two left-handed compliments what we have is a dreadful potential for loss of more working hours and of health in our streets...

The Communication Minister has made a pointed suggestion that the curricula at the school and college level should include traffic-related instructions so that the upcoming generations are conditioned to abide by these well in time. The functional literacy programmes meant for the adults could have such an element as well...

FOR the word corrections, I am indebted to current talks about the share market. When there is too sharp a rise in share prices, the market is likely to undergo a process of correction...

Why politics turned out to be so much polarised is a question that has puzzled me often. When I look back to the years of mass uprise and the events that followed precipitating the war of 1971...

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Unlike her, he is not seen taking an intractable stand either Kashmir or nothing. She is regarded as the biggest stumbling block in the way of normalisation between India and Pakistan...

What is, however, commonly shared is the belief that the polls will not take place on February 3, as announced by Islamabad. The general impression is that Pakistan is in desperate straits for money and it will take it a long time to get out of it...

Some even predict a military takeover because of the contradictions they see following the dismissal of the national assembly and the state legislatures. The Pakistan press has itself reported a deadlock in the caretaker government...

To the Editor...

Summary Trial: Oh Dear, No!

Sir, This refers to your editorial of 29 November, 1996. You deserve to be congratulated for rejecting the Prime Minister's recent statement for promulgating special laws and having a provision for summary trials...

If the present government has to stick to its election promise of establishing law and order in the country, it should be careful not to succumb to the seduction of such temptations, however, frustrating the 'legal system' is. Yes, improving the legal system by enhancing its efficiency is a worthwhile goal...

Legal system. Should the Prime Minister decide to listen to this set of simple advice we are confident that notwithstanding what the partisan supporters might say, she will garner greater public support and appreciation for her policies and the country will gain greater economic dynamism which it badly needs and greatly deserves...

If the present government is serious about bringing economic emancipation to the general mass, as it often proclaims, it will be well advised to look forward rather than backward to settle political scores. If the Prime Minister can be magnanimous to forgive those cowards who perpetrated heinous acts of barbarism to her family and foster an environment of law and order and political unity and stability, the country is likely to be a magnet for massive foreign and domestic investments which can lead to the greatest economic miracle of the twentieth century...

So our advice to our PM: please look forward, not backward; concentrate on building the economy and avoid too much parochial politics; and please don't ever tinker with the

The political killings need not have meant changing the course of politics. The Constitution was there, clearly indicating the line of succession. But the Constitution was flouted. Neither the Vice-President nor the Speaker filled the vacancy caused by the killing of the President

national crisis demanded and made possible this national unity. I am not denying the existence of quislings, traitors and doubters, those who believed in sitting on the fence, but they were swept away by the strong currents of history...

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The most generous view that can be taken of Zia is that it was not his design. Circumstances made a hero of him. He

was catapulted to the seat of Presidency by forces beyond his control. If, taking this generous view of the matter, greatness was actually thrust upon him, he never seeking it, then clearly two options were available for him...

PASSING CLOUDS

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

Bangabandhu before the war and the Father of the Nation after the War, from his high pedestal. Also it involved rewriting the history of the War of Liberation. Actually, no one wrote a history proper. Instead, what was done was to resort to a conspiracy of silence aided by a deliberate distortion of history...

There was a process of legitimising one's claim to rule. General Ayub Khan had shown the way. Ayub came to power by denigrating politics and politicians. Zia followed a slightly different course of denying the past, a past of which he himself was a part...

Also it involved rewriting the history of the War of Liberation. Actually, no one wrote a history proper. Instead, what was done was to resort to a conspiracy of silence aided by a deliberate distortion of history. The full resources of the government, the absolute control of the media, especially the electronic media, were employed in furthering a single

goal, if a complete black out of the political history leading to the War of Liberation was not possible, at least portions could be blotted out and portions could be blurred.

The tactic followed was reminiscent of Goebles who believed in the power of falsehood when repeated endlessly. The nation was asked to believe that Zia, not Mujib, was the real hero of the War of Liberation, and also, the war was fought mainly by our brave soldiers. The role of the government in exile led by Tajuddin, the role of the freedom fighters drawn mostly from the humble homes of agricultural Bangladesh was hardly mentioned...

Once caught in the web of falsehood, the successive post-Mujib governments knew no way out of it. Denial of the truth involved denigration of the hero which in turn involved ex-

alting the alter-hero beyond measure.

The recent pronouncement of two BNP leaders, first Col Wali followed by Obaidur Rahman is a sign that at long last the process of correction has started. You cannot deny Sheikh Mujib the greatness which history has given him and to which the world has given its assent. And you can still acknowledge the services of your leader without making of his behalf impossible claims.

The media, under the control of the Ministry of Information, the Radio and the Television, have launched a full-throated programme in December, full-throated in its celebration of the War and its heroes. A certain euphoria is understandable, particularly in the twenty-fifth year of the War of Liberation, but in presenting the account of what was done under the leadership of one party, the contribution of others should not be ignored. The presentations are not free from the charge of partisanship. If the balance of twenty-one years was a crime, the correction need not take the form of beating one's own drum all the time allowing no room for others. The media itself needs a little more correction.

A Time to Think Differently

The general impression is that Pakistan is in desperate straits for money and it will take it a long time to get out of it. In fact, there is pessimism over the conditions obtaining in the country.

It may be logical or not but many in India have begun to nourish the hope that President Farooq Leghari will take the initiative to resume the dialogue between Pakistan and India. Compared to Benazir, he is considered mature and pragmatic. Nearly two years ago, he had himself suggested at a breakfast meeting with senior journalists in Delhi that there could be simultaneous talks on other matters along with Kashmir...

Unlike her, he is not seen taking an intractable stand either Kashmir or nothing. She is regarded as the biggest stumbling block in the way of normalisation between India and Pakistan. New Delhi was pleasantly surprised when, on the appointment of Deve Gowda as prime minister, she wrote to him for resumption of talks. But her silence after his prompt and generous response was interpreted as a propaganda ploy. It turned out to be so.

New Delhi's predicament would be how to react if Leghari were to propose the talks. No doubt, the nominated caretaker government does not have the credibility that the elected one has. But the real arbiter in Pakistan is the military; it calls the shots. How does the status or character of a government matter?

If certain formulations are acceptable to the military, they will hold good for the new government. It seems as if the military is looking for some. At a recent hush meeting in Italy between senior retired officers from India and Pakistan, there was a serving Pakistan commander. This was the first time that the army officially participated in the discussion.

Even if Kashmir is on the top of Pakistan's agenda, India cannot have any objection to it. The Shimla Agreement specifically

stipulated elected government in the state. It will be in the picture in any negotiations. And chief minister, Farooq Abdullah has said more than once that the state's integration into India was final.

Pakistan will also have to do a lot of explaining to India because the Shimla Agreement says that no side will try to alter the status quo, directly or indirectly. There is no doubt that Pakistan has trained militants in Kashmir given them weapons and provided them with large funds. The process has not stopped yet. No dialogue can begin, much less fructify, if Pakistan's proxy-war does not stop.

Both Washington and Beijing, Islamabad's friends, have given it a piece of advice, which may not be to its liking. Washington, attaching great importance to the polls held in Kashmir, has reportedly told Islamabad to take the results seriously and face the realities. Beijing's advice is in the shape of an observation, which Chinese Ambassador Pei Yuan-yang, has made in New Delhi during a press interview: 'We do not stand for international-

isation of Kashmir issue.' In my view, the real problem is not Kashmir, it is distrust. That has to be tackled first. Peoples in both the countries live in ignorance, prejudice and even anger. Since the two have practically no contact with one another, even a rumour becomes a fact and a trifle an incident. Pakistan has such textbooks as are not helpful in burying the hatchet or looking at the future in a proper perspective.

By all means, the dialogue can begin with Kashmir. But if the other matters, particularly economic openings, are not taken up at the same time, the two sides will have very little to talk about after some time. This has happened in the past. They should discuss how to ease travel facilities from one country to another.

Foreign Minister Inder Gujral has taken some unilateral steps; for example, relaxation of visa restrictions. It is true that the police verification is still there, and the visitors from Pakistan are restricted to three cities. These irritations are annoying and they should go. But it would be easier to remove them if Islamabad were to reciprocate Gujral's gesture. Pakistan rarely issues visas to persons other than those whose relatives have migrated to its side. The policy is not to encourage contact with India.

It is, however, comical that under the aegis of America several seminars are being held in

New Delhi, Pakistan and even New York where the same people go to say the same piece in the same vein. Never have Islamabad and New Delhi blessed a quiet, frank talk, away from publicity, between the two countries. America, China and the erstwhile state of Soviet Union, were talking to one another all the time, although they never gave up their hostile postures. Even Israel and Palestine have held secret talks before beginning the process.

A glimmer of hope is visible in the shape of trade of sorts between the two countries. Most of it is pure smuggling. Still a few legal deals have taken place. They need to be deepened and expanded. They will help with vested interest on both sides. Several lakhs of people, including those who influence policy, will be benefited. Thousands of crores of rupees will be available to the region which remains extremely poor at present.

A meeting between India and Pakistan, official or non-official, should begin without further loss of time. One visiting Pakistani journalist has suggested the topic for the first meeting: Steps to abolish visas by August 14-15 1997, when the two countries celebrate the 50th year of independence. Both sides should know that frequent contacts change the mind of even inveterate opponents. A feeling of goodwill may come to be generated that will make it easy to tackle complicated problems. Leghari's initiative may provide an opportunity to think differently.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

achievement on the part of the government and the BB, and also our people will be benefited immensely with this booster to economy. Obaidul Kabir Chowdhury, Asst Vice President, National Bank Limited, Head Office, Dhaka.

In order to stem the growth of Taliban in our country, our madrasa education should be modernised and more scientific and applied subjects should be incorporated. Our Prophet Mohammed (SM) after his hijrah to Medina drew up a 'Covenant' with the Jews, Christians and idolaters based on equality and complete freedom of religions. He never tried to impose anything on others against their will. In his last sermon on Arafat, he clearly warned his followers not to waver in religious matters. After the Battle of Ohod where the Muslims suffered high casualty and the Prophet himself was injured, Bibi Fatima and other ladies of Medina rushed to the battlefield to help the injured. I suppose the Taliban did not overlook these facts.

chatty, blissfully ignoring the protocol! There was no communication gap, in spite of the language barrier, in touching the human hearts.

It made me recall my enjoyable trip to Spain, about a decade ago, as a tourist. As I roamed about in Madrid, Seville, Granada, and Barcelona, I instinctively felt some link with the history, architecture and culture of the people of Spain, a nation with substantial contribution to the progress of civilisation; now enshrined in the glowing pages of history.

In the global village of today, Bangladesh is not far away from Spain. Now it is closer, with the opening of our Mission in Madrid. Welcome to Bangladesh, the land of the people!

A Husnain, Dhaka

A reader's view on BUET affairs

Sir, First glimpse on the morning paper of Nov 25 gave me heartfelt joy. This is Dr Iqbal Mahmood's appointment as Vice Chancellor of BUET. The joy, galore, has been primarily due to two factors. One, BUET, which has so far retained its academic excellence in spite of the chaotic atmosphere elsewhere has been in recent days beset with turmoil on the campus on the position of a particular top administrator of the institution. Teachers and students, in general, have been voicing their grievances against him, and quite justifiably the government did not rush to any action. But fact remains the social haemorrhage in terms of loss of academic hours, time and toil has been enormous. Every sensible man and woman was eagerly waiting for a sensible solution.

Secondly, Dr Iqbal Mahmood, whom I am happy to know, is a superb person with brilliant academic performance, high integrity and broader outlook on our socio-economic issues. In spite of his political affiliation, if any, this can be vociferously said that above all, he is a man with vision, devoid of any parochial view. More so, during his long working experience, he has traversed various fields of life which has given him the unique scope to shape up as a capable administrator.

In a situation as we live in today, any action of the authority is tended to be explained in terms of partisan view. In this

background selection of capable persons beyond the consideration of party affiliation is what sensible people long to see.

In our quest to build a civil society based on sensibility in the backdrop of acrimony and parochial approach to national issues, the choice of Dr Mahmood comes as a soothing breeze and a victory of reason over narrow-mindedness. The sensible people of our society will, no doubt, be extremely happy with this appointment following the successive brilliant decisions relating to the selection of President of the country and the Governor, Bangladesh Bank. Number of capable persons in our society is limited, indeed. That is why we have to find out such persons from all possible situations and honour them by placing in suitable positions.

Hats off to Sheikh Hasina for her bold and appropriate decision. We look forward to many more such actions in days to come.

M Taheruddin, Dhaka

DCC dustbins

Sir, Over past several months, we have observed mysterious demolition and disappearance of many low-cost 3-4 feet high concrete garbage corners and CI sheet-made dustbins from various roads and streets of Dhaka and gradual replacement thereof with yellow colour steel-made costly dustbins. Most of these dustbins are kept and placed haphazardly on busy roads and streets in such a disorderly manner that the movement of traffic is obstructed and blocked.

We have also noticed that many old places which were earlier earmarked for dustbins and garbages have now been occupied by hawkers and vendors. We wonder whether the DCC has now itself started violating the traffic rules by parking and displaying its costly new dustbins here and there carelessly without any consideration of inconvenience caused to the members of the public.

We would request the Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation to kindly look into the matter and raise the quality and standard of services of the Corporation and to ensure better civic amenities to the people of this crowded and jammed metropolitan city.

OH Kabir, 6 Hare Street, Wari, Dhaka 1203

Not far from Madrid

Sir, We greatly appreciate the noble graciousness of HM the Queen of Spain to include Bangladesh in her list of foreign trips. With an sublime simplicity, and an open heart, she enjoyed the rural scenes in emerging Sonar Bangla.

Our womenfolk in the remote villages responded to this royal human touch with spontaneous hospitality, and received her warmly in their humble hearth — and got