

Confrontationism

There is tension in the air. Tension born not of problems that usually beset an individual's life. Tension not even created by the unprecedented suffering owing to days of waterless existence or interminable blackouts. This all-pervasive and undoubtedly harmful tension is wholly born of a national drift to confrontationist political postures and doings.

The government knows very well the importance of stability at this hour. Foreign investors need this to come and set up shop — the government has been already able to generate interest in them abroad. More important than the investor's faith in Bangladesh is our own dear people must get confidence in themselves, their nation and their government. They have invested in Bangladesh with their life. Destabilisation will not only hurt us materially, it will hurt us from within and make us altogether unfit to take on the challenges of the day. But both the AL party and the government are allowing themselves to be drawn into a mindless game of confrontationist politics. The government has done some positive things these past months. All this will be lost in an atmosphere of intolerance and violence making further progress by the government well-nigh impossible.

What happened in Feni is deplorable. The government could very well condemn it and express its firmness to punish those responsible for the shootings. The AL has observed a fall of Khaleda Day why? And why is administration trying to prove it was BNP elements who threw shoes at Yasser Arafat's car? The BTV has been turned into a commemorative-only channel. That is harmful enough. What if the AL party and government both become all-commemorative — observing days day after day.

The party cadre and sympathisers need activity as exactly as the party mastans need preys to bully and shoot at. Such activity has been historically of the agitational nature. But a party in power cannot go for agitation. AL must find more positive-natured work for its manpower than pitting it against the opposition in an impossible jousting of agitation against agitation. If the grassroots connections of AL were to put their heart into developmental activity, they could only earn the jealousy of the NGOs and win the heart of the people.

A party out of power must not have anything in the world but the thought of going back to power. But a party in power must not put all its worth into continuing in power. For it has the whole nation to care for. The better it does that, the better the nation will care for it in return. The government must pursue single-mindedly and doggedly only a one-focus thing: socio-economic development.

Adventurist Streak in India

What is a bolt from the blue to a Congressite like Sharad Pawar has indubitably descended on us as a downright inexplicable and surprising development at the centre-stage of Indian polity. The withdrawal of Congress support from the Deve Gowda-led United Front government has been a disconcertingly baffling dynamic if only because the coalition gave India a balance of forces as mandated by the last electoral verdict and political stability which was needed for economic frog-leaping for ten long months with a pretty much steady outlook fronting out on the horizon. By the past standards of three coalition governments in that country since after the mid-70's, this one shaped, looked, worked and performed better than any one of them.

The UF government had been cobbled together and the low-profile Deve Gowda was chosen to lead it after protracted negotiations among the 14 parties drawing upon the principles of secularism, social coalition of backward forces and better equations between the centre and the regions. What with the Congress' faulting the Gowda government for 'weakening the centre' and helping the fundamentalist BJP to form a government in UP with the Bahujan Samaj Party, secularism and regional balance have been put back on test again, this time under extremely uncertain conditions. From what has been a reasonably performing government India has slumped to power politics and jockeying for power in a hung parliament reincarnate. What is this if not political expediency-driven adventurism spearheaded by the Congress high command.

By the ready arithmetic reckoner neither Sitaram Kesri nor Deve Gowda nor Vajpayee is favourably positioned to form a stable government now. Consequently, we have a mid-term election in sight; but who can guarantee that such polls will not return another hung-parliament?

The UF government's exit will be a highly lamentable development for the region where its benign impact has already been felt in varying degrees on bilateral relations with Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan. We would like the trend to continue.

No Child-play

A timely tip-off led to the rescue of 16 children as tenderly of age as between ten and seven from a Banani house. Without it, they would have obviously been languishing in that dungeon-like situation as commodities consignable to, no one exactly knows at this stage, where, on this earth. And, un-tipped-off, many such weird stories of child abuse perhaps remain holed-up awaiting a twist of fortune to be uncovered.

An internalised trafficking in children seems to have come into vogue with innocent-looking facades of swearing by the objective of disciplining juveniles under shackles in a so-called madrassah or two or using them as a decoy to get in boys for the sheer business of running an orphanage. The Banani story has exploded the myth that the boys were held up to be inmates of a planned orphanage because nearly all of them admitted they have parents.

An immigration agency was housed there. And Delwar who apparently owns it has informed that the children were brought in at the directive of a pir from Tangail. The so-called mystery looks highly solvable. We want the culprits punished severely soon after the full facts are made available to the public.

If you are driving a car or be driven, the traffic problem out in the city streets boil down to too many rickshaws; intensified congestion due to ever-increasing number of so-called baby taxis; people every where trying to cross the roads; and, above all, the reckless nature of how the rickshaws are pulled or baby taxis maneuver to move straight ahead or turn right or left. The solution to the traffic problem is therefore fairly simple. Ban rickshaws. After all, Dhaka is now a huge metropolis. It is no longer a provincial town. Rickshaws do not fit in at all. And, baby taxis may be tolerable within certain limits. Beyond that, unlicensed baby taxis should be hauled up and forced to stop from plying the city streets. Therefore, without rickshaws and limited number of baby taxis, the roads are all for motor-vehicles — you drive or be driven in peace except for pedestrians who can be restrained by limiting road crossing to intersections with traffic lights only.

There are easy solutions are the best for less than 5 per cent of the city population who have access to a private or office car. The overwhelming majority must also use the road. How? Rickshaws and baby taxis are the major means of transport and unless there are alternatives, the city would easily come to a total standstill.

To deal with Dhaka traffic, the first major task will be to ensure easy and frequent public transport. Immediately what is necessary is a well planned, extensive, safe and comfortable network of bus services. Dhaka is perhaps the only city of its size where such a city bus network is not in place.

If there are 100,000 private cars, there should be at least 10,000 city buses so that at any moment of the busy hours, at least 5 per cent of the city population of 6 million would be using the services and given an average 15 minute travel time, the network should have the combined capacity to transport around 2 million passengers, twice a day, from 7 to 10 in the morning and from 4 to 7 in the evening within the limits of the greater Dhaka city.

If bulk of the working population as well as school-going children are enabled to travel by bus, the demand for rickshaws and baby taxis would automatically come down. Rickshaws will give way to motorized transport without any hassle. It would take less time and money. Above all, it will be much safer to travel in a bus than in a 'Risk Show' — the more appropriate name for a rickshaw of Dhaka today.

The traffic jam of Bangkok, Thailand is also phenomenal. But the city population have access to buses at every point — all over the city. Buses there have reserved lanes on all major roads. Even on one way streets, buses only are allowed to ply both ways. The priority of public transport over private cars is fairly obvious. Also, there is no road in Bangkok where buses and trucks are not allowed to enter. While in Dhaka, not only buses are few, many roads are banned to trucks and

Dhaka Traffic — How to Deal with It

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I bring the question of trucks here because for economic growth — they are perhaps more important user of roads than many of the cars. The utter disregard of the pedestrians is another significant feature of the Dhaka traffic scene. Flyovers to cross the streets were only three in Dhaka only few years back. Few more flyovers have now been added; still we need at least few hundred such flyovers all over Dhaka Metropolitan area. Let there be provision for safe

crossing of streets — only then we can think of minimising traffic hazards on city roads. Basically, in the strategy to deal with Dhaka traffic, the interest of the majority must come first and foremost. Private car owners are perhaps least important. For over 90 per cent of road users, there must be safe and reliable motorised transport, that is buses; and, for pedestrians — absolutely safety and completely separate means for street crossing. Once buses and flyovers are numerous, we would create the pre-conditions for better traffic management. For example,

but must be effectively pursued and the pollution level will automatically come down. The measures suggested above cover the short-term actions. It would minimise the problems and in no way resolve them for all times to come. Every year, new cars and buses will be added and compete to occupy the constant amount of road space. May be in the year 2000, 100,000 new cars will be registered. What do we do then?

First, buses will not be enough. If we increase the number of city buses to twenty or even thirty thousand — a time will come when buses alone will clog the streets so much that nothing will move or move at a snail's pace. It may take two to three hours to go to Motijheel from Uttara Model Town. The situation will turn out to be as dreadful as in Bangkok today. We must, therefore, plan from now on for a Mass Transit system so that each transport carrier is capable of moving few hundred passengers at a time and at 80 kilometres per hour within the metropolitan area as well as from nearby areas such as Comilla or Manikganj.

There may be a circular train service around the city with two elevated tracks cutting across the city — one from north to south and the other from east to west. Near by towns can also be connected by such fast trains so that a distance of 100 kilometres can be easily covered twice a day between work place

and home. However the number of cars will increase and with favourable economic growth, an ever-increasing number of families would wish to own a car first and a home next. Population of Dhaka will exceed 10 million by the first decade of the 21st century and the number of cars could be a million.

Clearly, we need more roads and the plan to build roads will be to put priority on bypass roads so that cross town traffic may avoid coming inside the core city area. Like Rome, the next plan should be to construct a ring road around greater Dhaka so that travel from North to South is not through the congested city streets but via a circular express way which travels towards south-east or south-west instead of dead south via the airport road. Road planning is a very location specific endeavour and there are among wasted interests which often throttles the growth of a city — giving way to disorderly road traffic. Since land prices are too high, inner city roads are always very expensive to build. The alternative, therefore, is to build road around the city and bypass roads to the highways going out of the city. The city will then have scope to expand outward and pressure on the inner city space could be softened.

Ultimately, dealing with Dhaka traffic should be integrated with expanded city planning which has hardly began today and was conspicuously absent in the past. The best example is location of Uttara Model Town conceived as the northern limit of the city — only few decades back.



Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

home and travel regularly to their work places by bus. This has already happened between Uttara and Motijheel and therefore should be possible at other places as well. Pollution is another intensifying hazard of Dhaka traffic. All the 10,000 buses, I mentioned, should be fueled by compressed natural gas (CNG) which is totally pollution free. Private car owners may be provided with tax incentives to convert to CNG and all baby taxis ought to be replaced by 4-stroke engines, if not by CNG, with the next two to three years. The required measures are few

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Is Bureaucracy An Ailing Tool?

by Fazlul Kabir

If, strictly speaking, carrot-and-stick policy is deserved by bureaucracy, so it is, equally and legitimately, by all of society's remaining segments. For, it is not bureaucracy alone that keeps its wheels moving.

WITH the privatisation drive gaining momentum, governmental role in all spheres will correspondingly be on the decline. To the extent, however, governmental role cannot be dispensed with, its charter in the form of bureaucracy will continue to be there to reckon with. This means that, in the foreseeable future, bureaucracy will continue to be an issue for the intellectuals to tax their brains on.

All today varieties of questions have been raised over bureaucracy's efficacy and equally various suggestions have been offered by way of making it what is popularly termed as pro-people or people-oriented. In the context of any reference to bureaucracy these two terms are so glibly used that it stands viewed as essentially anti-people or, at any rate, oriented to anything but people. How fair such gross assessments of bureaucracy are has hardly been questioned and, since all thoughts and arguments in this behalf followed a stereotyped pattern, bothering little for any logical nexus, their output turned out to be no better than repetitive exercises in some routine waddle. Things relating to bureaucracy remain as enmeshed in confusion as before.

In fact, most of us, using the term 'pro-people' or 'people-oriented', do so without full awareness of its ramifications. If it is asked what bureaucracy is, at all oriented to, if not to people, there will hardly be any clear answer. And the reasons are not far to seek.

To the Editor...

What is the name of the game? Sir, Recently, I went to the market to buy some coffee. I was happy to see the famous Nescafe brand (Indian origin) in abundance in the shops. Since storing coffee is a tricky job, I was particularly attracted to the polybags of 50g content. But when I checked the expiry dates printed on the back of the packets, I was astonished to find that these are nearly 2 years old (Mfg. May '95/Exp. April '97) I checked in about a dozen shops and each of them had the packets of the same batch! I felt confused. Because these contents should not have been on the shelves in the first place, let alone buying and consuming them.

Now, what is the game? Is the importer in Bangladesh bringing in these nearly-expired and rotten stuffs at cheaper rates and reaping a windfall profit cheating the consumers here in terms of their money and health? I am confident that no Indian buyer will have them even if they are given free! I know very well how particular and fussy the Indian buyers are about these dates! I checked the manuals consumer should be. Somebody should do some checking somewhere!

Although the government (the DCC precisely) has the responsibility and authority to stop this unscrupulous practice it will be futile to ask for it. Consumer consciousness must grow here! Let us not buy these nearly-rotten stuffs. Let us remember that somebody somewhere is cheating us with our money and robbing our health! By the way, has the CAB done anything in this respect?

growth and sustenance. History speaks of no phase when it was done away with or any thought to that effect was given. Be it ancient, medieval or modern, bureaucracy has been the cardinal weapon of governance in all ages.

Secondly, bureaucracy is not a mere tale of some inefficient, headstrong and truculent people either. World history is as replete with instances of brilliant and self-effacing bureaucrats as it is — fairly speaking, only insignificantly — with the reverse type or types. There is, therefore, little point in a wholesale censure of bureaucracy and least in picking it up alone out of a variety of professions for haranguing. If, strictly speaking, carrot-and-stick policy is deserved by bureaucracy, so it is, equally and legitimately, by all of society's remaining segments. For, it is not bureaucracy alone that keeps its wheels moving.

But yet the fact remains that bureaucracy is the society's prime mover and, therefore, legitimately viewed as the most suitably positioned deliverer of its embryo or is capable of generating. Bureaucracy, on its part, is aware of these expectations — which, in the context of the constraints that hamstringing it, verge on exacting importunities — and has learnt to live with them without much of demur. Thus, for example, it is bureaucracy that is left to face the bar of public opinion when, say, a crackpot writes a blasphemous book or a poem leading to

mass agitation. Nobody will buy the concerned bureaucrats' plea that they had no hand in the chap going to jail and no control the situation. That districts deputy commissioners and police superintendents often fall victims to such intriguing circumstances is common knowledge. With anything going awry in their respective jurisdictions they find themselves withdrawn with the stigma of what is a widely known term because of its profuse use — tactlessness.

In its variety of technocracy either, bureaucracy finds its going none too smooth. If, for instance, salinity increases in the river waters, fingers from all sides are invariably pointed at the engineers doing the innocuous job of monitoring the water flow. Likewise, public apathy to hygienic living and the consequent outbreak of, say, intestinal diseases may end up in putting the health sector's bureaucracy in the dock.

The question whether the bureaucrats in the concerned fields had anything within their means to obviate the incidents, let alone stalling the ubiquitous processes — forms no part of the judgement of those passing so-called considered opinions. The above are only three typical instances of how casually bureaucracy's functioning is generally viewed. If these opinions are pooh-poohed as mere hearsay talks, the matter ends there. If, on the other hand, they are looked upon as really considered opinions, the ques-

tion legitimately arises: Are those who form bureaucracy largely cretins or, at best, dullards?

The answer is obviously in the negative. Despite competing demands from other professions such as teaching — particularly the one at the higher level — banking, journalism etc., bureaucracy, by and large, remains an enclave of gifted individuals. In fact, barring those who make lateral entries (as, for example, was the case in Pakistan in the early seventies) or who rise up from ministrant positions, a substantially high level of merit is almost guaranteed in bureaucracy. It is guar-

anteed by the very method in which recruitment to it takes place. There is simply no way for a nitwit to come out with flying colours through the grueling procedure prescribed for recruitment.

While the above is true, equally true are the charges levelled against bureaucracy — tardiness, sluggishness and, capping it all, paradoxically though, inefficiency. And here is the crux of the issue. Why do bunches of people, picked up through a rigorous process and chiselled by repeated bouts of training, both at home and abroad, eventually turn out to be doves whose

ended with production downside. When people at large are faced with this unfortunate situation there is little explanation from government on such vital issues.

As a private citizen I feel strongly that government should immediately arrange for exposition of the situation arising in various sectors of national life through electronic media where experts on the relevant subjects, eminent and knowledgeable citizens, cabinet ministers concerned and others may explain the background of the problems, current position, the steps taken by the government for ameliorating the situation and the approximate time frame within which these steps are likely to give results. The issues to be taken up should be power, law and order situation, the context of transit and its possible impact, Chittagong Hill Tracts situation and all other issues of national importance. While the government is trying to evolve an arrangement for autonomy of radio/TV the government may ensure objectivity and balance in programming the electronic media in the light of the steps taken by the interim government a few months back, to create confidence and a sense of objectivity and transparency in respect of the information media.

transfusion is necessary. If the two ladies do not mend their ways, queer leaders like Ershad would come back again and again, even if we do not like it. Credit must be given to Ershadian personalities who surface in our history from time to time and who are somehow able to rule over the turbulent Bengales for nine long years — good or bad is a separate issue. Why our genuine political leaders cannot apply mass psychology in the same successful manner?

The time has come when the people might get fed up with the present dual leadership, and might be inwardly thinking of seeking a change that would be sudden — and quick, based on past experience. Duality should not hinder Bangladesh from emerging as an economic tiger — the two ladies are jointly and entirely responsible for the stalemate. Please wake up for the sake of the country, or shake hands in cooperation and coordination, and work together whether in position or opposition.

He also has a point about the two Begums who rule the nation's destiny. They may kindly consent to retire voluntarily from politics, and open the window or door at the top. There is political suffocation upstairs, and lack of fresh air and oxygen. The political carbon monoxide pollution has to be removed. Political blood

OPINION

People Want to Know

M Taheruddin

During the period of nine months of coming to power, the government under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina has no doubt achieved commendable successes in a number of areas of national importance, such as, water treaty with India, facing the fertilizer situation of the country, setting up of an Commission to redress our grievances in legal system of our country, keeping price situation at a fairly reasonable level, boosting the country's image abroad, creating considerable confidence and interest among foreign investors, adopting various measures which have to an extent stabilised the law and order situation etc. It is worth mentioning here that from day one, BNP left no stone unturned to make the life of the new government difficult. In public meetings some of the BNP leaders have even threatened to repeat August 15 episode which is highly unfortunate. The party leaders went on record to say that the government cannot be allowed any more time and all out measures to be taken to unseat them. In spite of the conciliatory steps taken by the government the opposition showed the signs of being hawkish in every possible issue of our socio-political life.

Reflections on Silver Jubilee 'Celebrations'

A Senior Citizen

The DS supplement contained some hard-hitting criticism of the thick-skinned political leadership. I enjoyed Syed Manzoorul Islam's controlled and analytical tirade against third class political culture still prevailing in the country after a quarter of a century (and before that the 'Pakistan' experiment which failed after one generation due to communal and religious cultural gaps, and the religious could not keep it alive. In the ME, the religious bond does not work: Iraq, Iran and the Arabs).

Ironically speaking, our greatest enemy today is the lack of political culture; indirectly the top political leaders who enjoy public confidence. For this lack of lackness, the politicians are entirely responsible, otherwise their citadel could not have been usurped by non-political outsiders. He should not directly blame the failure of political leadership, they step in good faith, and leave later making a greater mess, because they come from a different pro-

Registration of pesticides

Sir, Registration, marketing, distribution, quality control and uses of pesticides are governed and regulated by the Pesticide Act and Rules. A separate directorate under the Ministry of Agriculture having trained staff at thana level is responsible to implement all the affairs of pesticides as per the act. A high-powered committee (Pesticide Technical Advisory Committee) headed by the Secretary of Agriculture with members from all the agriculture-related research institutes, fishery, health and environment pollution departments and the Agri-University is responsible to look after and formulate policies relating to pesticide and pest management within purview of the act.

Registration and introduction of new pesticides is a continuous process which is of great importance with the advancement of science and technology. New pesticides are being invented having advantage over old products. This committee is responsible to look after this vital issue. But without any legal ground and justification, they have stopped the process of registration of new products and also banned some registered products particularly synthetic pyrethroids which is the latest group of pesticides having low mammalian toxicity, high efficacy and environmentally safe.

I, therefore, request the chairman and members of the above committee to kindly honour the country's law and to act accordingly, otherwise there will be legal complications. On the other hand, farmers will be deprived of benefits of the latest brands of pesticides.

Creating overseas markets

Sir, The definition of modern war has been changed. Nowadays, an developed country captures the market of other country rather than occupying that country by force. To capture the market of the other country one country, should be well developed in technology as well as industrial sector.

Our country is a big market of many developed countries. It seems that we are going to be dependent through losing our local market and failure to create market in other country.

Why are we not self-dependent in every sector of everyday-use products? Why do we have to import everything from foreign countries even the necessities? From my point of view, the main reasons are: lack of patriotism, and mentality to sacrifice for the nation.

If we take a closer look at India, we would find that their one whole generation did a sacrifice for their coming generation in the name of love. They were happy to drive Ambassador cars while we are driving Japanese Toyota, Suzuki etc. Now the Indians are assembling Mercedes Benz and BMW. They are self-dependent — from food to aircrafts.

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On the other hand, a big part of our businessmen who do think about how to make high profit within a very short period of time. Bangladesh, now at its 25, is just like a young hot blooded boy who can do anything at any time. So it is high time to start from the beginning. Hopefully, one day we will be able to create market in foreign countries and leave a better future for our coming generation.

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