

Why Always Uphill?

The resignation of Kazi Fazlur Rahman as Chairman, Public Administration Reforms Commission on health grounds does not quite come as a bolt from the blue.

Here was a man with three decades of administrative experience and a good deal of integrity and probity appointed with the rank of a full minister to deliver on a stymied but key reform process.

In point of modus operandi he seemed to have fought a lost battle, too. His original move to work autonomously with adequate financial authority delegated to him was frustrated.

The inspiration generated among the public by his appointment following submission of resignation (also on health grounds) by former cabinet secretary Ayubur Rahman got switched off as indecision continued for what could be trend-setting four months for the commission's work.

All of this goes to show how resistant the government machinery has become to any reform undertaking. This has happened with the recommendatory phase, and Heaven knows how difficult the implementational process might have been!

We are Worried

The Chittagong port crisis seems to have taken a turn for the worse. Although the port authority, in its placatory overture to the Chittagong Feeder Trade Committee, has claimed 'improvement' in the situation, country's premier sea port is far from being over the hump as far as its chronic worker-user feud is concerned.

What bugs us most is the role of the concerned ministry. What is it doing? It has been years since Chittagong port has been devitalising country's economy instead of invigorating it and here the ministry is passing days apparently with not a care in the world.

We have been airing our anxiety over the reign of utter misrule in Chittagong port for a long time and here we urge the ministry again to be loud and clear on the crisis. It should remember that port authority pleading for mercy with an organisation abroad makes for a very sad commentary on its efficiency.

Heads Should Roll

Even a hair-line crack overhead in a newly built house gives one an apparition of an impending danger. The feeling is weird, like he or she has seen a ghost of destruction in the fault-line.

To top it all, we now hear of new buildings collapsing or tilting with far greater trepidations caused about lethally flawed engineering malpractices. How horrified we are in the latest instance of an upcoming four-storey residential building at Bashabo tilting three feet pressed down by the under-construction second and third floors.

Several heads should roll from the dangerous swaying of a residential building. Mind you, the Tower of Pisa tilted so little over so many centuries and yet so many felt jilted. Should not we ask ourselves such questions as: (a) who passed the plan for the second and third floors (b) who was its contractor (c) was the owner singly responsible for what he did and (d) what is the standard supervisory practice in such cases?

We want the law to take its own course.

Can a country be sold? The only example that comes to my mind on first thought is the sale of Alaska by Russia in the 19th century to the United States of America. Thereafter, such large scale buying and selling of territory has taken place in the history of the world.

Can a country be sold? Yes, it can be sold if deliberate actions and inactions by the government fail to protect its vital interests. For example, if due to failure of the government to conclude any effective agreement, Bangladesh is denied the waters of any river during the dry season.

Can a country (or a part thereof) be sold? In physical terms, a country consists of a territory or land and water mass bounded by international borders beyond which are either the beginning of the territory of another country or open international waters belonging to no particular country.

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To the Editor...

"One who was present"

Sir, I read a letter printed in this Section of your newspaper on December 13 that commented on my December 10 article titled "The Prime Ministers Meeting with the Secretaries".

No, it is not that I don't have the stomach to digest bitter criticisms. Like any other columnist/commentator, who expresses his mind in public, I know that I am also exposed to open public examination.

First of all, as the writer of the letter himself agrees, my article was based on reports carried by some leading newspapers of the country including The Daily Ittefaq, and those were printed four days before the publication of my article in The Daily Star.

Second, the writer accused me of concentrating on the problem of death of skilled officials alone and for not covering other matters that transpired in that closed-door meeting. The writer appears to have failed to understand the difference between a report and a commentary.

Third, the bitter-most bite of "One who was present" was that, according to him, I belonged to an "ilk" of journalists, who write "irresponsible and unethical pieces". Although nothing could be outrageous than that, I believe over the years my readers have showered me with enough admiration to enable me to digest it with good grace.

Can a Country be Sold?

The absurd alarm that the country is being sold because of the peace agreement or South Asian Growth Quadrangle or opening of trade routes to north-east India is a highly regressive attempt to constrain development of Bangladesh so that we remain poor and destitute.

failed to conclude any peace agreement with the original inhabitants of a part of its territory so that those inhabitants continued with their anti-state, terrorist activities, then also government should be considered to have failed to protect the vital interests of the country.

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Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

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However, these are mostly de- wooded lands. Millions of hectares in the Hill Tracts are tree less, covered with useless shrubs and bushes. The entire area suffered long due to unsettled conditions. We need peace and stability to restore the productivity of the highlands. We need considerable investment to let the flowers bloom again in the hills. In addition, exploration, drilling, transmission, processing and finally, marketing of oil and gas from the Hill Tracts ought to make a vast difference between what is Bangladesh today (low income and least developed) and what it could be tomorrow (middle income and industrializing).

The absurd alarm that the country is being sold because of the peace agreement or South Asian Growth Quadrangle or opening of trade routes to north-east India is a highly regressive attempt to constrain development of Bangladesh so that we remain poor and destitute.

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LETTER FROM AMERICA

And the Winner is ... Benjamin Netanyahu!

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

Like Warren Christopher before her, Madeleine Albright has encountered an unavoidable reality. Between the stubbornness of Benjamin Netanyahu and the indecisiveness of Bill Clinton it is difficult to set a course for American policy.

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the Shamir government of Israel. By stating that Jerusalem was a "disputed" city, President Bush caused the fall of the Shamir government in early 1992. The American Jewish lobby went into overdrive. They succeeded in defeating a President whose approval rating was in the nineties only a few months earlier.

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OPINION

Building Maintenance and Beneficiary Participation

Moyenul Islam

Recently, my visit to a district hospital to ascertain the repair and rehabilitation needs under a foreign-aided project, it was observed in a bathroom that the flooded with water due to missing of a bibcock! On enquiry, it was revealed that despite hospital authority's several requests, PWD had not replaced the bibcock which hardly costs Tk 50 only! The hospital authority did not have any fund for maintenance.

It is a pity that different foreign donors as well as the government have constructed many essential buildings like hospitals, schools, cyclone shelters etc., but over the years condition of the structures have deteriorated and many of those have to immaturely abandoned due to lack of repair and maintenance since their construction. If a building, however, is not looked after, it will gradually disintegrate and be destroyed by wear and tear. This disintegration will accelerate for each year provided that maintenance is deferred and quickly become out of control. The longer maintenance is deferred, the greater the cost of the deferred maintenance.

There are three categories of maintenance works viz. routine maintenance, periodic maintenance and emergency maintenance. Regular cleaning is a routine maintenance job. Dirt, rubbish, cobwebs and old leaves should never be allowed to accumulate anywhere, either inside or outside of the building. Apart from breeding grounds for insects and rats such accumulation of debris expands and bursts the concrete and that part of the structure quickly becomes weak and useless. The concrete will first crack and later it will start to come down in big flakes, exposing the rusting.

Buildings should not be allowed to reach this stage. Hence routine maintenance plays an important part for the life of a building. Such small things and some others like cleaning of pipes and septic tanks can be easily taken up by maintenance and users. The historical top-down approach of the maintenance programme needs to be changed and awareness should be developed so that users and beneficiaries take care of the buildings and save the buildings from premature disintegration and destruction. Beneficiary involvement in the maintenance of the structures is a key part of a strategy to raise awareness and assumed that by participating in maintenance, the beneficiaries become intrinsically involved with the structure and feel the building as their own.

In schools, students can clean their classrooms and school premises at least once a week. For hospitals, godowns etc., the initiative and interest of the authorities will suffice. They have their paid sweepers and other MLSS. A clean institution reflects the good aptitude and taste of the management. Periodic maintenances are like replacement of hinges, tower bolts of doors and windows, defective bib-cocks, gate valves and pipes in toilet, cleaning of pipes, septic tank, drains and minor repairing of plaster, concrete and painting etc. Repairing of damage of lime-terrace may also be required. This may also be taken up by beneficiaries and users periodically, say, once in a year to save further deterioration. This will certainly involve some found that can be raised by the institution concerned or the government. We should remember the age-old proverb: "A stitch in time saves nine". Emergency maintenances are required to be done after natural calamities like flood, cyclone, war etc. The repairing works depend on the intensity of the damage. Post-flood and cyclone damages are mainly doors, windows and cleaning of floor, walls tubewells etc. Beneficiaries and users may also get involved in these repairing works voluntarily.

The writer works at BCL as a Senior Engineer.

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Why use wrong term?

Gulf War returns

Bakhtier Farouk (By e-mail) USA

Sir, Most Sylhetis say that they are Sylhetis, and not Bengalis! Do they mean they are superior or different? I don't know. But they often say so. Doesn't matter really, whether they want to be Bengali or not, as long as they think themselves to be 'Bangladeshis'. For, that is our real identity. Our country's name is Bangladesh, so we are all Bang-

ladeshis. No matter whether we are Sylhetis, Noakhalis, Dinajpuris, Dhakaites, Chakmas, Garos or Moinpuris. That is where the mistake was made by choosing the wrong term 'Bengalis' for the Chakmas. It infuriated them so much so that they took up arms and started to fight! For, they certainly are not Bengalis but what they certainly are is Bangladeshis. They definitely wouldn't have mind being called that. So much, for just a wrong choice of term!

As in India everybody is an Indian, be he Bengali, Punjabi, Assami, Gujrati, Marhati or a Rajput. In Pakistan everybody is Pakistani, no matter if he is Sindh, Baluchi, Punjabi or Pathan. In America, everybody is an American and in France everybody is French. So why this confusion in our country, which is so small that we dare not call ourselves anything but Bangladeshis.

Dr Sabrina Rashid Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka.

Mohamed B Rahman (By e-mail) Dhaka