

Whose Onus is it Anyway?

A report published in a leading vernacular daily this week has not only revived the chilling sensation down the spine but has also made us ponder if at all there is any one to look after matters concerning public health. If the *Sangbad* report is anything to go by, then there is none.

It informs with fearful clarity how the lone food laboratory of the capital has remained inoperative for seven months. Want of space has been attributed as the problem. We are amazed to know that despite having a sprawling office premises adorned with a fourteen floor edifice, the City Corporation authorities find it difficult to house the laboratory with all its valuable equipment, huddled on one of the floors collecting rust from prolonged disuse!

With the laboratory non-functioning, the food inspectors naturally do not have any job. What strikes one as a tale within the tale in its own right for sheer absurdity is the number of inspectors. For a city with a huge population like Dhaka there are reportedly only 22 food inspectors; eight are on job in the sense they are under some training programme. The rest 14 are just twiddling their fingers or as we are so wont to hear enjoying the status of *bekar*.

Where are we going? We munch mouthful of fried rice or *mudi* with blissful ignorance making light of suggestions they are spiced with fertilizers like urea for their whiteness. The same chemical is said to be responsible for the 'fair complexion' of sugar that taste so sweet for our taste buds as well as somnolent consciousness. It can be a legion. In fact, we are so many light years behind others in consciousness about what we consume everyday that dark possibilities like 'mad cow disease and 'chicken virus' do not even have a chance to cast shadows on our mind.

What does the City Corporation do? Can it betray the tax paying citizens in the manner it is doing now over a serious issue like public health? For that matter what is the concerned ministry doing? May be, threat to their own precious health which the content of this report poses eminently, will wake them up to their long disused sense of responsibility.

Take the Bull by the Horn

Members of the BCS (Admn) Cadre Action Committee who saw the Prime Minister on Tuesday have expressed satisfaction over the outcome of their meeting with her. Similarly, an earlier meeting of the coordination council of other BCS cadres, *Prokrichi* for short, with the prime minister, had ended on a positive note. So, the warring sides should now make peace and put their shoulders to the nearly clogged wheels of the administration — thanks to their struggle for 'superiority' or 'parity' depending on which side of the coin you look at.

What are the net results of the meetings the BCS (Admn) cadre and the *Prokrichi* have had with the highest political authority in the country? The inter-cadre problems will be for the still amorphous Parliamentary Standing Committee on Establishment Ministry to deal with and recommend solutions to when it comes into existence. The Prime Minister has promised to constitute it during the current session of Jatiya Sangsad. But with the BNP still keeping out of parliament the standing committee cannot be a composite, broad-based body it should be.

That's why we placed emphasis on administrative or executive action in our previous editorial on the subject pending, of course, finalisation of the recommendations of the Public Administration Reform Commission. When the suggestions of PARC or the service reorganisation body are adopted we would need to legislate on them and that is exactly where the select committee and the standing committee of the Jatiya Sangsad will be involved.

We are at a loss to understand why the highly enlightened members of the republic's various cadres are pressing so hard for what are deemed to be short-term benefits when their durable gains are all embedded in the service reorganisation exercise which, we assure them, cannot be put off indefinitely. The government, for its part, mustn't be entrapped in another series of adhocs which might complicate matters for administrative reform.

Tell-tale Signs

Urban experience is not a state of bliss anywhere in the world. But Dhaka looks destined for a dubious distinction in its share of new evils.

One of the more frequently reported urban nuisance in the recent times has been this growing trend of free eating at restaurants by groups of youth. The other day a shop owner was badly mauled for asking such a group to foot the bill. Recently a canteen on the Dhaka University campus was known to have been smashed twice in a week reportedly by the cadres of the ruling party's student front because the owner refused to pay heed to their orders to be entertained *sau* (Bengali for things that you don't have to pay for).

There is now a growing propensity towards anarchy and lawlessness everywhere which strikes fear in the mind about the future of this city of ninety millions. While a section of the society is getting literally filthy rich at the cost of the land's laws and institutions, another is sprouting like the proverbial hydra-headed monster for whom robbing others for self-aggrandisement seems to be as authentic as anybody's birth right. It is the law abiding, relatively unadventurous peace loving people with a tinge of devotion still left for ethics who seem to be worst affected appearing more like one caught between the devil and the deep sea.

Neither the social scientists nor the government think-tank seem to consider them as ominous signs for the days to come. We however do not share their smug complacence and feel unless the reins are held with certain ruthlessness now things might just go out of hand.

From Despair to Hope: A Bleak Journey for the Rural Poor

Implementation of a poverty-oriented rural development strategy involves the giving up of power and resources by those now in control of them.

POVERTY represents a way of life of majority of the developing world's population today. The crisis is concentrated in the countryside. Conventional methods of eliminating, or even alleviating, poverty have as yet been notably unsuccessful. The misery is there to see and that inspite of long-standing formidable forces of individuals, institutions and programmes arranged against it.

No doubt, at all levels of society and in all walks of life individuals exist who have strived to bring the entire range of decent existence within reach of most of the poorest strata of society. However, one must be aware of the difficulties in attempting to translate such discrete contributions into a self-sustaining process. Designing a strategy and structuring activities that address the needs of the rural poor and are eventually owned by them present enormous difficulties.

The initial premise that I venture to submit is that the processes inherent in a poverty-oriented rural development strategy is to a great extent contrary to established political and bureaucratic instincts. Political and bureaucratic self-interest, even enlightened self-interest, dictate against the steps which such strategy and processes involve and dictate against them over time. A traditional underlying assumption, for example, has been that empowerment of the powerless requires the political commitment of the government and that commitment must be a continuing one. Yet, historically such miracle as has occurred has taken place inspite of the government. Indeed where the seeds for development of the rural poor and by them have been



Do I Dare!
A Z M Obaidullah Khan

cannot be ignored. It involves some potentially subversive ratifications for the power holders and the establishment.

Another major complexity is that the process takes time and requires a dynamic and continuing approach rather than static or a politically time-bound one. One must consider than when a certain percentage of the rural poor graduates from abject to tolerable poverty, they will fight the hardest to keep what they have and acquire more. On a country-specific basis this dynamics and continuity constitutes an enormous problem. The newly-created as well as the traditional political power-base are both threatened. It is, therefore, important to recognise that the poor of today are not a homogeneous mass and that they may well not be the poor of tomorrow.

The Bureaucratic Structure

Implementation of a poverty-oriented rural development policy and programme also threatens the authority of traditional and fragmented ministerial lines and their modes of operation. Poverty-oriented rural development, overtime, involves the entire spectrum of development activities, and thus most of the line ministries. True, a component of a project or programme can be designed which falls within the authority and responsibility of a sectoral ministry. However, such a component would require a coordinating mechanism with other components. To the extent that this coordinating mechanism intrudes upon individual ministries, it represents a threat to the established bureaucratic line of authority.

On the other hand, if a cross sectoral ministry/department is set up like the rural development ministry, it inevitably takes on some of the functions of another ministry. There is infringement, and thus conflict, with the established bureaucracy. A rural development ministry, for example, engaged in building feeder roads comes into conflict with the department of Roads and Highways, even if the department has eschewed feeder roads in the past. Or again, a rural development ministry which assists in organising water-user's groups to optimise available irrigation facilities quite often encounters the opposition of the water ministry.

The relatively extensive time horizon presents another bureaucratic problem even within individual ministries. Any new fangled initiative almost necessarily involves a diversion of resources rather than supplementary funds. Budgets are too tight to implement existing projects/programmes. Therefore, the apathetic or negative attitude of the entrenched bureaucracy to new or innovative initiatives is understandable. Political masters may come and go, so also fads and buzzwords, but the bureaucracy is forever.

Again, a development approach that aims at replicability involves typically a change in approach of the national professionals, technocrats and bureaucrats. Few professionals will entertain a compromise in established standards or technology, no matter what the rationale or the cost. A first-rate professional in the developing world may resent having to live in a *second-best* world. He/she is hardly in a mood to be involved in perpetuation of what seems to be a second best existence.

Bureaucratic resistance is further heightened when two fundamental tenets of human development, namely decentralisation and popular participation are introduced. As for bureaucratic decentralisation, there is the very simple inter-ministerial loss of power from the centre to the field. A more irreconcilable anathema to any bureaucracy is the concept of popular participation. Unfortunately, bureaucrats and technocrats alike, have a contempt for the unkempt people. It is a rare professional who enjoys substantive discussions with laymen particularly when the laymen have a say in the decision-making process. Yet successful rural development must build on local systems and traditions and resurrect local knowledge to create common wisdom. Infact, one could argue that if implicit in the process of poverty oriented rural development is the accountability of both the political establishment and the bureaucracy to the people, then it would represent an unwelcome second best.

The witness said after going

back to the cantonment, he found that Zia had already taken over the charge and was addressing the officers as the Chief of Army Staff before the charge had been handed over to him.

Shafiqullah said Zia even went to Bangabandhu and said that (Shafiqullah) will not be able to control the officers and requested him to give the charge of the army chief.

The PW-45 described the reasons of dismissal of some officers from the army and some of the incidents before and after the killing of Bangabandhu that included raising of Rakhi Bahini. Those incidents led to commotion in the army as vested quarters misinterpreted those, he said.

About raising of the Rakhi Bahini, Gen Shafiqullah said with the deterioration of law and order situation after the independence and failure of police to recover illegal arms, army was called out to do the job.

As this job was hampering the training of the newly built army, Gen Shafiqullah said, he met Bangabandhu and requested him to give the responsibility to others and with that aim the Rakhi Bahini was raised.

Some quarters reacted over raising of the Rakhi Bahini and started ventilating that it had been created as an alternative to the army, he said.

Besides, when the army was engaged in recovering illegal arms, a few unruly and unwanted situations happened in which some army officers were involved, he added.

He said Major Dalim, who was engaged in the job at Kasba area in Comilla, beat up two to three members of Chhatra League to take revenge of student-life rivalry.

Major Dalim along with some army officers attacked the house of Gazi Golam Mostafa over a quarrel he picked up with Mostafa's son in a wedding party in 1973. Major Dalim was relieved from the army for his indisciplinary behaviour, he said.

Major Noor, who was PS to Deputy Chief of Army Maj Gen Ziaur Rahman, the witness said, was dismissed from the service for his anti-government statements protesting the dismissal of Major Dalim.

Some vested quarters made a negative propaganda on the issues and that also helped in building commotion in the army, he said.

The power to arrest vested in Rakhi Bahini by a law enacted by the government also created a confusion following negative propaganda by certain quarters, he said, adding that it also created dissatisfaction in the army.

Shafiqullah said the forced retirement of Col Taher and Lt Col Ziauddin from the service

Saddam Hussein: An Enigmatic Leader with a Cat's Life

It is an axiomatic truth that all, friends and foes alike, nurture a deep and terrible sense of fear out of him.

AT any point of time in history, there exist some persons who become objects of great controversy so much so that a deep veil of mystery surrounds their life, work and sense of purpose. Iraq's President Saddam Hussein figures prominently among the few such persons that subsist in contemporary history.

The person, who has been severely condemned time and again for what were termed as quixotic adventures, garrulous misdeeds and colossal national wastes, is variously described as a misguided genius, a mistaken fool and even, to the extent of, a devil incarnate. To some others, he is regarded as a veritable leader whose policies and actions stemmed from a deep sense of patriotism and were designed solely to restore the past glory of his land and people. Both these positions hold good, albeit partially.

The first of the great misadventures he embarked upon was a war, in 1981, with the neighbouring Iran, with whom the internecine feud has been perpetually ranging from time immemorial. During the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution in Iran with the consequent weakness of economic strength and disarray of military prowess of Iran, Saddam Hussein, who is known to his people as "Jaish," made the first

composition and activities of the UN team of inspectors of prohibited weapons. The expulsion of American members and refusal of entry to the latest team are the glowing examples of such bravado. The price for paying all these is heavy and is being paid by the people of the country through their nose. Economic deprivation of the people has reached the highest peak. Essential foodstuffs and medicine also have been scarce. The limited food for oil deal and the mercy of some friendly nations remain the prime source of hope and subsistence for the people.

One does wonder why and how this great survivor survived so long in the face of so heavy odds. If his policies and actions caused so much of distress, humiliation and deprivation to the people, why not people took up arms against him and toppled him? This question has baffled many, rather most, people. Even most knowledgeable of all, the arch enemy Iran, could not make an objective assessment. A senior Minister confided to me while I was assigned in Tehran that he would give Saddam Hussein between six and nine months to last in power. Several years have elapsed since then. Saddam Hussein has become stronger than ever before.

A logical explanation, perhaps, is the ability of this shrewd, determined and cruel leader to play all facets of emotions of the people in his favour. People can be variously described as those who love him, hate him and/or fear him. Some people do love him, no doubt, for his heroic deeds, being able to withstand, though briefly, the onslaughts of formidable and numerically superior foes, and ostensibly for his oft-repeated patriotic pronouncements. Many more people hate him for having brought untold misery, severe distress and economic hardships to them as well as to others.

But it is an axiomatic truth that all, friends and foes alike, nurture a deep and terrible sense of fear out of him. The reported execution of General Saddam, who acted as a friend and comrade-in-arms with Saddam, a few days ago only proves that the traditional policy of this ruthless Baath dictator has remained unchanged. From the very inception of taking over power two decades ago Saddam Hussein has been ruling the nation with a clenched iron fist. A significant number of his erstwhile close partisans, relatives and friends, besides innumerable disidents, have been simply eliminated. The fortunate ones got exiled.

The state was and is still running as a police state. The only parallel that can be drawn is in North Korea, where a similar statecraft is in vogue. There have been numerous disclosed and undisclosed coup attempts which have so far been foiled. He survived all the nine lives of a cat and one wonders how many more he will survive in future. But it goes beyond doubt that the person of Saddam Hussein has been and will remain a mystery, to be adored or to be hated by people. But, none can afford to remain indifferent to this enigmatic person.

BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

Gen Shafiqullah Tells Court

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He said he had suggested that the army be developed on the basis of divisional concept instead of brigade concept.

Gen Shafiqullah added that these two incidents had also created dissatisfaction in the army.

Turning to the formation of army in post-independence Bangladesh, the former Army Chief said he did not get any ready-made army and tried to build up an institutional army. The army, he said, was run on ad hoc basis till 1975.

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At one stage, Shafiqullah said, he he had tried to phone Bangabandhu, but failed to contact. Then he rang up Col Shafiq Jamil, and Air and Naval chiefs. He also asked deputy chief of army Maj Gen Ziaur Rahman and CGS Brig Khaled Mosharraf by phone to rush to his house.

Shafiqullah said after the arrival of Gen Zia and Brig Khaled Mosharraf within 15 to 20 minutes, he informed them of the whole incident and directed Khaled to go to 46 Brigade and help Shafiq Jamil.

But, Zia repeatedly told me not to send Khaled Mosharraf. 'He (Khaled) is going to spoil' Zia said.

Finding no other way, the witness said, he went to Army HQ after sending Khaled to 46 Brigade. Zia followed him to his office, he added.

From the office, the PW-45 said, he contacted the outside formation commanders over phone and talked to them.

The former Army Chief said he first came to know about the killing of Bangabandhu over radio which was brought to him by his ADC at about 7 am.

At one stage, the witness said, Gen Zia, who was sitting in front of him, told him not to allow Khaled Mosharraf to go out anymore and asked him to prepare operation order as Indian army might get in on this pretext.

He said he had told Zia that he would 'look into the matter.'

By the time Khaled came back and as he started describing the satiation at the 46 Brigade, the witness said, he heard sound of chaos from outside. At that time, he said, Gen Zia, Military Secretary Col A S M Nasim and CGS Khaled Mosharraf were present at his room.

Gen Shafiqullah said then suddenly, Dalim along with some armed soldiers forcibly entered his office and targeted their arms on him.

Although Dalim was a dismissed officer, the witness said, he entered the room wearing army uniform, keeping some buttons of his shirt open.

To be concluded tomorrow

To the Editor...

Gandhi's religion and politics

try. This is something over which we have no control.

Poverty is our constant companion, but the aesthetic sense in us about the rural people is much deeper and stronger than that of the westerners. It is our pride that has been reflected in our literature and culture.

Nature's cruelty to humanity in Bangladesh shows the courage, vision and fertility of the common people with which they struggle hard to survive against many man-made problems.

It is most unfortunate that voluntary organisations or agencies operating in the countries like ours only desire more publicity than deeds.

It seems to me that the number of the selfless and the self-sacrificing people is on the wane.

Abu Ashraf Noor
Uttara, Dhaka

In praise of monarchy

Sir, who says the British Monarch has lost its popularity?

A recent AP despatch from Suva, capital of Fiji, quoting the Fijian