

## Good Sign in BNP

A refreshing wind of change is blowing inside the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. It looks like being the product of having put the finger on popular pulse at the nick of time. In a connective development of immense significance, BNP's district unit chiefs voiced support at the National Executive Committee meeting to the views expressed by legislators at the BNP parliamentary party meeting for ending their boycott of the Jatiya Sangsad.

That a subject-matter of such enormous political consequence was taken up for discussion and freely mooted by all concerned at the two especially convened national level meetings of the party does a world of good to the BNP's image of somewhat frozen rigidity. This is a sign of intra-or inner party democracy that the BNP hierarchy has opted for marking a departure from the obsessive clinging to a coterie-dominated decision-making process. Obtaining majority view relating to an issue before taking a party stance on it or seeking it on a stance already taken are both indicative of political maturity. Only that eliciting it *a priori* proves more pragmatic than doing it *post-facto*. Better late than never though, because the BNP high command is still in a position now to reassess the situation in the light of what has transpired from the National Executive Committee and the parliamentary party meetings and avert the danger of arbitrary decision-making on a matter of vital national importance.

We welcome what has happened both in terms of the opinions aired at the meetings as well as the party high command's initial respect for a basic norm of intra-party democracy because these reflect our own views on such matters.

Our only hope is this trend does not stray into meaninglessness by being a casualty of a tradition whereby a one-liner is issued in the midst of a controversy that it has been entirely left for the party chief to decide upon. To avert such an anti-climax Begum Zia herself should express her solidarity with the overwhelming sentiment expressed by the majority in BNP and decide a course of action accordingly.

## House Rent Hike

Owners in the capital have raised house rent twice in last six months' time. According to a report published in a leading Bangla daily, owners hiked the rent last June immediately after the budget announcement. The rationale there was the mandatory provision for filing tax returns. Came new year and up went the rent again. This has by now become a culture for the owners at the advent of a new year. Rise in the price of the utilities was their excuse this time though there never quite is any dearth of a pretext. On one hand they would raise rent at the slightest change in the index of living cost, on the other, they make sure that none of these raises are there in 'record'. Receipts of real transactions, be it of bills, annual raises or advances, are not given to tenants who perforce accept these unfair and one sided conditions which more often than not are used as an effective device to change tenants.

It is clear house owners in Dhaka are taking an unfair advantage of the increasing demographic pressure on the metropolis. And people of the fixed income group are the worst sufferers. We feel it is time the 1963 House Rent Ordinance was reviewed. Having said that we also feel mere reviewing won't do. History teaches, mere formulation or revision of rules would not have any effect unless the root of the problem is addressed.

Evidently, today's market reality has given houseowners the scope to be manipulative. There are far too many houseseekers compared to the dwelling facilities available. Unless there is an expansion of housing facilities, the problem will only grow bigger. Now is the time for the government to address the issue. A suitable policy package and investment for a planned and affordable real estate growth is what the doctor ordered. Private sector is coming into the real estate business increasingly. But unless a governmental policy is in place followed by its strict observance, private sector's arrival will be limited to business and it will not be of any help to the people who suffer most — the middle and the lower middle class.

## Three Cheers for Cricket

Neither side, as one T.V. commentator observed during Sunday's epic runoff at the Dhaka Stadium, deserved to lose. Yet one had to. That is the rule of the game in a competition. By that token, India prevailed over Pakistan in the final of the Independence Cup cricket tournament. Our congratulations to India and man of the match Saurav Ganguly. Commiseration to Pakistan who despite amassing a massive total of 314 starred by two fine hundreds by Saeed Anwar and Ijaz Ahmed could not have the last laugh. At the end of the day there was nothing left for them. Winners took it all.

Leave aside the matter of mementos and few thousand dollars that were up for grabs, the real winner in Sunday's record breaking run feast was cricket — the game itself. A fullest expression of its spirit would not be found easily. Indian batsmen inspired by Tendulkar and guided by the redoubtable Saurav showed how commitment and patience can help a side achieve a target that is usually beyond the realm of probability, something that should go down both as a lesson and inspiration for all students of the game. The sportsmanship of the Pakistani cricketers evident in their ready response to umpire's call to continue the match in conditions that were certainly not acceptable for day time cricket, proved there are, even in this age of fierce competition, many things between victory and loss of truly exemplary kind.

But the party who has or who ought to benefit most from this great spectacle is Bangladesh. The packed galleries and people's passion for the game barring few embarrassing instances of over enthusiasm have put Bangladesh on the world cricket map. Now it is our cricketers' turn to match this huge public enthusiasm with a degree of consistency in their performance. There should be acceleration, only acceleration from now on and no retardation.

# Bureaucracy: Why it Worked, Why it Didn't

*The preeminent role of the CSPs revived again after 1975 and rule of the general administrative cadre became the order of the day. The significant drawback, overlooked all throughout, had been the utter lack of realization that we needed a new breed of managers, not administrators; a new class of technocrats, not bureaucrats.*

In Pakistan, fairly inexperienced, junior officers of former ICS occupied vital important positions of the administration. Secondly, number of such inexperienced ICS officers were too few and administration suffered from lack of critical manpower. Thirdly, no attempt was made to bring in experienced people from other sectors or occupations, since lateral entry to the civil service was practically ruled out. Above all, many of these elite officers were not trained to the ICS. They did not pass through the stiff competition and therefore the basic quality of many of these ICS officers were definitely below the desired level.

In India, the situation was entirely different. There were several senior ICS officers of the rank of permanent Secretary to the Government and there were many more of the levels of Joint Secretary and below. The officers mostly came through competition. Many of them were erudite scholars. They had the experience (to me the most critical factor) to bring about the transition from a colonial administration to the responsive civil administration of an independent country — maintaining parliamentary cabinet type of Government, both at the federal and state levels.

In Pakistan, particularly the then East Pakistan, we had to suffer from an inexperienced and immature leadership of the civil administration. At the same time, there were several Engineers, Doctors, Police Officers — holding responsible positions in their respective technical Departments as well as senior BCS officers who had come through competition. They were experienced and in length of service, many years senior to the Chief Secretary of East Pakistan. Throughout the first 20 years of Pakistan, there were many BCS officers who after putting in 30 years of service retired without ever hoping to occupy any position beyond the Deputy Secretary of the Central Government. All senior positions of the Government became the vested interest of the Civil Service. This was most unfortunate.

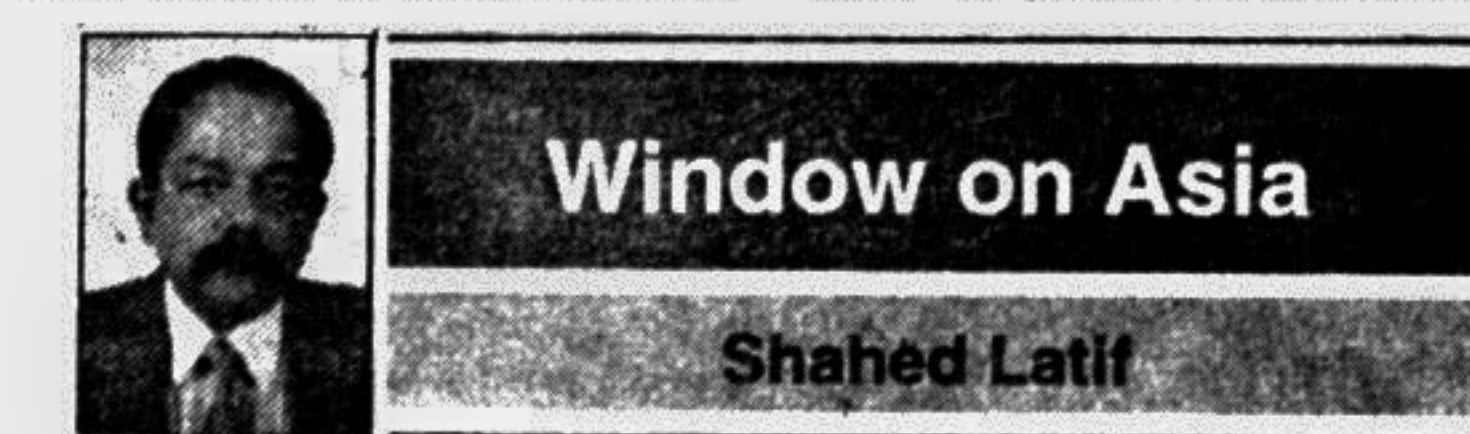
The creation of a mature cadre of senior bureaucrats was never in the Agenda of the Government, since those agenda used to be prepared by members of the CSP. It was not the case in

India. Very early, provisions were made in the IAS for lateral entry and talented persons from other services were absorbed into the cadre in order to create a responsive and not exclusive administration which effectively made the transition from the law and order orientation to a development minded, democratic administration. Unfortunately, it remained a colonial bureaucracy in Pakistan. Officers belonging to the Civil Service of Pakistan con-

year a brilliant group of fresh university graduates entered the service. Later on, the training programme used to be a confidence-building process which also enabled the officers to acquire a rare decision-making capacity. Promotions were assured and the entire cadre of officers backed each other to the hilt in case of any difficulty. Unfortunately, these great qualities were not utilized in the interest of true public service. A powerful administra-

Agriculture while a CSP officer of hardly 7 or 8 years of service after his tenure as a Deputy Commissioner would easily occupy that position. Same used to be the case in all other technical departments whose efficient functioning were vital to the development of the country. It used to be argued that such technical officers never acquired the required management or decision-making capacity. In fact, the denial of senior appointments never enabled those technical people to secure the desired management capacity. The prospects of serving under officers of the Civil Service who were of the age of their sons could never be a happy outcome after 25 years of work as a senior Engineer in a technical department. There were no incentives left any more.

After 1971, the remnant of the civil service continued their grand innings with a renewed fervour. The new Government of Bangladesh faced shortage of senior officers and overnight, Secretaries of Provincial Departments became Secretaries of the Ministries of National Government, involving double and triple promotions. Officers with only 15 years of service came at best a Joint Secretary, but they all headed important



Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

coated the infamous Basic Democracy system to perpetuate authoritarian rule in the country. There used to be intense competition among the CSP Deputy Commissioners to organise extremely colourful receptions for the all powerful President. In the 1960s, masses of people would throng the streets to welcome the President and the skilful Deputy Commissioners spared no efforts to hire truck-loads of people from villages and city slums — entirely to the satisfaction of the Supreme ruler.

And, those who served the authoritarian Ruler well, received their rewards as well through good postings and an eminent status as the best officers of the cadre. All the symptoms of an immature bureaucracy were manifest in the behaviour of the senior officers — mostly belonging to the Civil Service of Pakistan. They were no longer working in the interest of public service. They did not remain neutral to the interest of the party in power which should be the essential attribute of a civil service in any democratic country. The senior public servants, in particular, used to remain servile in the interest of the ruler. The Civil Service therefore remained bogged down to their old colonial heritage. They could never get out of it.

It must however be admitted that the Civil Service had certain qualities which helped them to perpetuate their supremacy over the entire civil administration. The recruitment process ensured that each

## OPINION

## Roundtable on Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord

A press release from Bangladesh said on January 7 that President Shahabuddin Ahmed would not call any roundtable conference on the agreement on Chittagong Hill Tracts. He, however, reiterated that since it is a national issue of highest importance, both the Government and the opposition can discuss this in the Parliament or outside.

Earlier, on December 21, the leader of the opposition Begum Zia along with her other party leaders met with the President wearing black badges to protest against the peace agreement and sought his intervention by way of calling a roundtable. After coming out from the Bangladesh Begum Zia told the waiting pressmen that the President agreed to her proposal (to arrange a roundtable).

On December 22, the Prime Minister met with the President and said that this matter can be discussed in the Parliament only. Apparently, she did not like the idea of the President calling a meeting or his intervention in this matter. She thus rejected the opposition leader's proposal for a roundtable on this issue. On that very day, that is December 22, a press release from Bangladesh, the official residence of the President, said that the President preferred to remain above all controversy and will give his decision later.

On January 7, the Secretary General of BNP, Mr. M. Rezaul Karim, said that the President told the Secretary General about his inability to intervene in the matter. And the press release which came in the newspapers on January 8, is just a follow-up of the press release of December 22 and the meeting of the President with the Secretary General of BNP on January 7.

On January 8, BNP put the blame on the Government's

### Barrister A Hasib

non-cooperation for the President's 'failure' to call a roundtable on the agreement on Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Now the question is: how the Government of Sheikh Hasina can be blamed for the 'failure' since President Shahabuddin Ahmed refused to call such a roundtable? If the President agreed to Begum Zia's proposal for such a roundtable (as told by Begum Zia to the waiting press after coming out from Bangladesh on December 21) and if he failed to keep his commitment in this matter, BNP could directly blame him. Instead, BNP said that the President is the most respectable person, an impartial person, but he could not call the proposed meeting due to non-cooperation from the Government.

BNP wants to eat the cake and have it too. They praise the President but blame a third party for his alleged failure. The proposal for a roundtable and its acceptance was between the President and BNP. Awami League was not party to it. If they think that the President went back on his alleged acceptance for such a roundtable, BNP could frankly say so. But they would not. They implied innuendo in a clear way, for they believe that the President will ultimately side with them in the matter of CHT agreement when the proposed bill for the legal coverage will go to him for his approval.

Yes, the bill will go to him and it will be a test for the President in more than one way. He will pose with manifold thoughts in his mind. He will think about the different provisions of the Constitution he has undertaken on oath to uphold; he will think whether local Government can go down locally or go up regionally; whether his own judgement (about the eighth amendment

Ministries and inexperience again became a distinctive feature of the decision making process. However, the new Government brought in university professors to constitute a powerful Planning Commission who bypassed the Ministries and took major decisions affecting the national economy and its future development. The preeminent role of the CSPs revived again after 1975 and rule of the general administrative cadre became the order of the day. The significant drawback, overlooked all throughout, had been the utter lack of realization that we needed a new breed of managers, not administrators; a new class of technocrats, not bureaucrats.

The major task of the Government today is to promote economic growth. The role of bureaucrats must diminish as a consequence. In the recent past, the development role of the Government itself have diminished. Government has no business to be in business — it is the ideal which should be pursued relentlessly. Above all, the National Government should cut down its functions and hand over many of its responsibilities along with corresponding authority to Local Government institutions.

The residual will constitute a lean and efficient National Government where merit will be the criteria for selection, where knowledge and experience rule and technocracy, not bureaucracy, prevail.

## To the Editor...

### "Can a Country be Sold?"

I have gone through the article *Can a Country be Sold?* by Mr. Shahed Latif in his column *Window on Asia*. I hope the author will take it positively if I express my views on the phrase 'selling of a country'.

It does not have to be literal selling only like that of Alaska. I hope he remembers that the independence of Bengal was sold to the British East India Company in 1757 by Mir Jafar Ali Khan and his cohorts like Jagat Seth, Raj Ballav, Roy Durlav etc., for their own sectarian interest.

Their treachery led to the domination of the British over the South Asian subcontinent for almost 200 years.

I strongly feel that the CHT agreement has compromised the unitary character of our constitution. For this act of default by the present government the future generation of Bangladesh may have to pay dearly. As regards the Water-Sharing agreement of the Ganges, it has already failed as we have received the lowest per discharge of water at Farakka during the last dry season.

We have done a blunder in signing the agreement without a guarantee clause and the presence of a clause in the treaty for an international arbitration. We must remember that India has all the rights to look after her own interests. It is we who should look after our own interests.

Therefore, the selling of a country does not have to be physical transfer of a part of a country; it can be non-achievement of interests of country by the ruling coterie by default or through a wilful act to achieve a sectarian interests e.g. in the case of perhaps staying in power at the cost of the country.

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### "Dependency on private coaching"

Sir, The write-up by Fawzia Ali under the above title published in the DS on 27 December '97 does not cover fully the major points that are mainly responsible for 'dependency on private coaching' in our country. The real problem lies not in Bangladesh, but in the attitude of people all over the world. The global need for talents reigns supreme in today's world which is very competitive and challenging.

Along as the conventional system of education is retained in our country the scope of eliminating private coaching is very bleak in present times. It would not be possible for the government or the people to ban private coaching for our wards. The author of the above article being the Principal of a

government college, is not fully aware of the fact that the classroom for teaching in the educational institutions is far below the average. Talented teachers are not attracted to take up the teaching profession. As a result, the needs of the talented students are being made by the system of private coaching at the moment.

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### New bank deposit of foreign currency

Sir, The value of our Taka compared to US dollar and pound sterling is decreasing day by day. We have devalued our currency several times during last 14 months. This affects our exports and imports and also makes our economy pale. Not only that the Malaysian, Indonesian, Thailand and the Philippines currencies are also sinking which is causing widespread discontent and restlessness in whole South and South-east Asia.

Due to global trend of market economy and growing private sector investment everywhere, we in Bangladesh need more foreign exchange i.e. US dollar and pound sterling to vitalise and boost our economy and industrial development.

In our country we deposit our money in local currency, Taka, with our saving, current and fixed deposit bank accounts. When we deposit foreign currency i.e. US dollar and pound sterling in our bank deposits, it is converted into local currency.

We feel that if our government/Bangladesh Bank allows us to maintain and deposit foreign currency, dollar/pound, in separate and new bank accounts our country would not only be able to earn, deposit and save more US dollar/pound sterling, Bangladesh Bank's foreign exchange reserve would increase and our national economy would also become stronger.

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### Footbridge at Khilgaon

Sir, Khilgaon Railway is the only passing point for the thickly-populated areas such as Goran, Sipahibagh, Madartek, Bhabho, Khilgaon etc. A large number of vehicles and thousands of people pass through this point everyday. As a result, traffic-jam is commonplace here. A few days ago, while crossing the highway, adjacent to the railgate, my father was seriously wounded by a tempo. This type of accidents are occurring here regularly.

Nur Jahan  
East Nasirabad, Chittagong

### EPZ for Sylhet

Sir, Sylhet is one of the most resourceful areas in the country. A large number of people of Sylhet are living abroad and sending huge amounts of foreign currency back home. Many of them are keen to invest in Sylhet. Sylhet is well-connected with Dhaka by road, rail and air and with Chittagong by road and rail. Sylhet is also quite a big town having adequate medical, educational and housing facilities.

So if an EPZ is set up in the vicinity of Sylhet town it is likely to attract good investment both from foreigners and Sylhetis living overseas.

I therefore request the EPZ authorities to explore the possibility of setting up an EPZ in Sylhet on priority basis.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury  
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

### Hostages to terrorists

Sir, The news item published in *The Daily Star* on January 7, '98 under the heading 'Traders take up hockey sticks to fight toll collectors in Ctg' conveys the true picture of the present situation of our country. It was stated that the traders association at Terry Bazar distributed hockey sticks and whistles among the traders and businessmen in the area to resist the terrorists and toll collectors unitedly.

This reminds us the speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman which he delivered from the Liberation War, IPJ/JPhr PJ KTJZ IJJA KJP- k'af gJPTJ - WPR WPR Nvt VPZ gJPTJ (be ready with whatever you have got — make every house a fortress.)

In the regime of his daughter Sheikh Hasina, the same words are applicable though now the enemies are not outsiders but our own people.

All over the country many sorts of heinous crimes are happening at such a rate that people have become terror-stricken without knowing what to do as law-enforcing agents seem least bothered about people's safety. It is a great pity and a matter of shame that the government is failing to give a secured life to people and they have to innovate ways to survive.

## The Erosion of Good Governance in the Established Institutions

These days the public is peppered with publicity and propaganda on 'good governance' by the leaders at home, and the public figures abroad, including the UN. It sounds like a new slogan; and the donor agencies are throwing mild feelers of decreasing or withholding financial and technical programmes unless the standard of administration were improved in the developing countries.

'Transparency' is the slogan these days. The midnight oil had to be burnt and the clock 'suspended' to make the WTO provisions transparent in the Third World; and the Green pact was not so white, after all. Bangladesh cannot escape from this environment of transparency international. 'Good Governance' is one of the good bugs, and we have to clean the system with anti-virus programmes. We do with our computers. More buggy days are ahead.

The local politicians are keeping a low profile, not because they do not support the idea, but they are charged with the responsibility of good governance as the elected representatives of the people. The problem is with the discharge. There are other players; the civil service, for example; and the visitors at the counters.

The bureaucracy is the main pillar of administration, and this club of civil service has been built up through centuries, and honed and trimmed for local application, by the local officials, who are steeped in local mores. Therefore there are few escape routes with lame excuses, and ignorance, in this case, is not a bliss.

Basically the daily business, official or otherwise, runs normally if the regulations are practical and up-to-date, and the

implementation is strict, fair, and unbiased. This system of implementation, monitoring, testing, prosecution, and punishment is neither new or original; remembering that the staff is well trained to carry out their specific jobs. Indifference and procrastination are the headache of the supervising officers. The strength of a chain is in the weakest link.

The weaknesses, as we see today, are more in the human side than in the system; although we lag behind in updating the rules and regulations to meet the topical needs of faster changes in the society and the working environment. One of the reasons for the latter situation is the break or lack of continuity due to changing political factors in the emerging countries.

But the standard of inspection has gone down so much that the drawbacks mentioned above are not enough to explain the ineffectiveness or system loss in this professional field. In fact, the moral and ethical values, have eroded in almost all the professions, with the result that the public and the service seekers are not getting the performance expected from these trained and experienced professional groups. The situation has not been created suddenly, but has built up, first slowly (acceptable losses), then sharply, as counter-measures were not initiated fast enough to nip the situation in the bud. Today each new regime is burdened with the omissions and commissions of the preceding regime, and the pending work is too much to clear or clean up in a background of political instability. Ad hocism is the enforced style of the decade. So good governance starts

with the politicians, and bad governance ends there. It is an endless loop, with other inner loops within the mother loop. Negative teamwork also works! It is not a shocking statement, but what is shocking is the gross and daring indifference displayed to clean up the mess. If the top fails, then, the corollary of the quantum theory could be applied to confirm that the ultimate judge will be the janata, at foundation level. The latter has heavy mass, and it takes time to generate the fly-wheel effect. That should be once in a while, for its other name is revolution.

There is a consolatory escape route: the smaller flywheels at higher levels, which could be more amenable to visible change. For example, start with the civil inspection departments, and the performance of the police. The latter is too much visible, hence hardly get the benefit of the doubt most of the time, as they are also misused by those who are supposed to be fair and just.

As for the sense of duty of the inspectors, dereliction has several adverse implications (for example, keep in mind only two sectors, food and medicine):

- the health hazards. Who are noticing?
- the value for money spent by the consumers;
- QC, the quality-control culture and image;
- the export image;
- the image formed by the potential investors in these sectors;
- the trust factor, adversely affecting the good image of the Administration. Where is good governance?

We are jumping from one vicious circle into another. Where is the starting line? The finishing line will then appear automatically.