

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 perform 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 homeowners 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 runfest 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 fest 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 1947, when Pakistan came into being, the leaders of the colonial bureaucracy, officers belonging to the Indian Civil Service (ICS) who opted for Pakistan, constituted the mainstay of the civil administration that emerged to replace the colonial administration. It was the same in India. The so called steel frame or the ICS cadre dominated the departments and ministries of the Governments of post-colonial sub-continent.

The colonial ICS which later became the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP), should have brought about similar developments in both the countries. However, while India succeeded in developing a democratic form of Government with the strong support of the civil administration under the leadership of the IAS, Pakistan abandoned parliamentary democracy after 1958, military dictatorship became the order of the day and ultimately, the country itself broke down in 1971. It is true that CSP alone cannot be blamed for the disaster. There were other parties involved. However, being leaders of the administration as well as chief advisers to the Presidents and Ministers, CSP's share of the blame cannot be inconsistent.

The IAS did deliver the goods in India. It played its due role in building a strong united India. The Civil Service of Pakistan failed in its task in a very thorough going manner. Basically, the two service cadres with very similar systems of competitive recruitment, vigorous training and an elitist mentality performed so differently. Why the system worked so well in India and why it didn't in Pakistan?

In August 1947, the senior most ICS officer in Pakistan was the rank of Deputy Secretary — a fairly junior officer within the administrative hierarchy of the Government. The first Chief Secretary of the Government of the province of East Bengal, the highest level bureaucrat of the Provincial Government had hardly completed 14 years of service. The promotional jump, almost overnight, was a quantum leap and the important issue of whether such junior officers had the capacity to man such senior positions were totally ignored. That Chief Secretary might have been a brilliant officer, but he definitely did not enjoy the requisite seniority. There cannot ever be any substitute of experience — a critical element which was lacking as an essential attribute of the Head of the Provincial Admini-

stration. 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-

tinued to serve its own vested interests — keeping other well deserving candidates away from playing any decisive role in the decision making process of the Government.

In particular, senior technical experts were denied access to the making of vital development decisions which indeed proved to be fatal. For example, a senior Director of Agriculture never became the Secretary of the Provincial Department of

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 can at best be a Joint Secretary,

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.

Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

cooted 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 render services 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

So, two footbridges are needed here immediately — one is on the south of the gate and other on the north side over the highway. For now, the bridge on the south is very essential.

I want to draw the kind attention of Minister Mr Saber H Chowdhury about the matter.

M Rezaul A Bhuiyan
Khilgaon, Dhaka

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 business in the area to resist the terrorists and toll collectors united.

This reminds us the speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman which he delivered before the Liberation War, IPDJoJPhr pJ KTZM IJPZ IJA KJP- K-af gJPJ WPr WPr hNVT Vpz BzJpJd" (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.

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

OPINION

Roundtable on Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord

Barrister A Hasib

A press release from Bangabhaban said on January 7 that President Shahabuddin Ahmed would not call any roundtable conference on the agreement about 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 Bangabhaban 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 agreed to Begum Zia's proposal for such a roundtable (as told by Begum Zia to the waiting press after coming out from Bangabhaban 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 was between the President and BNP. Awami League was not a party to it. If they think 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 is fully justified in advising BNP to discuss the CHT accord in or outside the Parliament. BNP has been voted by the people to voice their grievances in the Parliament. Awami League is nobody to create a so-called atmosphere for BNP to attend the Parliament to speak for the people. They have a right to attend. BNP deprived people of former President Ershad's constituency by not allowing him to attend the Parliament. It was not a self-imposed restriction. But in the case of BNP, as was in the case of Awami League in 1994-95, it is a self-imposed restriction to represent the people of their constituencies.

There is still time for BNP to discuss all issues including the peace accord in the Parliament and unfold its different clauses which hit the Constitution. This is also the democratic way to hit Awami League. Any other method may be tantamount to hitting the people and the economy of the country.

The Erosion of Good Governance in the Established Institutions

A Husain

These days the public is peppered with publicity and propaganda on "good governance" by the leaders at home, and the public figures and international agencies 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 for 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, as 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 the centuries, 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

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 flywheel 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;
- 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.