

Enough of Semantics

Words, words and words. Indeed Sunday's international workshop on Dhaka City Management Reform which followed hot on the heels of Mayor Hanif's completion of the fourth year in office was wordy, the city father once again presenting a jeremiad of his hamstrung executive existence.

Certainly lack of ideas cannot be blamed as an impediment. Plenty of studies have been done so far to seek answers to the challenges Dhaka is facing as a growing metropolis. In fact there are files of recommendations and proposals that have not been opened yet, and for all practical purposes, are gathering dust in the shelves of government offices.

There is, however, no point in dwelling on things that cannot be changed or redeemed as there is no point in putting the feet up in the hope for days that will see everything falling in place automatically. We, therefore, urge the DCC to involve itself in some affirmative activism for a change.

We urge the government to go the whole hog for the ADB-funded urban poverty eradication programme involving some one million slum-dwellers and the project for solving Dhaka's traffic problem, one which the IDA is willing to finance.

Sad but the refractory reality of the day is that mere DCC drive is not enough to make these things happen. The intervention of the Prime Minister's office seems absolutely essential.

Swathed in Gratitude

The nation-wide observance of the 79th birthday anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is a fitting tribute to the stupendous contributions he made to our being what we are today. But for his formidable presence and dourly articulation of Bengali demands in an invincible-looking Ayubian era, topped by a thunderously orated passage of the non-cooperation movement against a Yahya regime, caught in a diabolic Bhutto trance, Bangladesh would not have been born.

This newspaper from its very inception kept a special corner for his due place in history. At a time when others were choosing to be indifferent to the lingering amnesia about him, we would editorialise on his great 7th March speech and memorialise his day of assassination. We would go on to seek an early annulment of the Indemnity Ordinance which shielded his killers through a criminal violation of the rule of law. This has become a reality since.

Now that his visage has been resurrected from the stranglehold of purely politically motivated attempts at exorcising him from public memory the new generations have fortunately become aware of who he was, what he stood for and what his deeds were for his people. We must now forge ahead. And in doing so, let us remember his credo: "I want to put smile on the faces of the have-nots my country."

Quite Worrying

Alarming statistics have been reeled off by the Bangladesh Renal Association at their national convention on Sunday. Eighty lakh people suffer from kidney-related diseases in the country. Forty thousand die every year without receiving any treatment whatsoever.

The very high incidence of kidney-related affliction can be attributed to lack of awareness about it. People either don't know or hardly care to know how the malady is caused and how it aggravates to a point where kidney dialysis and transplantation become unavoidable. Such procedures are so expensive that these had better be avoided by timely intervention and therapeutic treatment.

To manage the existing huge number of renal cases every hospital in the country ought to have a kidney unit. This is the first step we must take because public awareness-building can be truly meaningful only when there is a facility to turn to. At the initial stages, that is.

Democracy — the Nepalese Way

There are speculations as to who will be the next Prime Minister in a Congress led government — G.P. Koirala or the younger Sher Bahadur Deuba. . . Kamal Thapa with the experience and confidence of a three time Foreign Minister, reassured me that no matter who came to power in his country, Nepal will forever remain steadfast in its friendship with Bangladesh.

THESE days we have been having our fill of the Indian elections and their aftermath. The world's largest democracy happens to be our neighbour and what with the Indian dominated electronic media, we are exposed to it day in and day out, with someone or the other expounding on the post-election moves. This would of course hardly be the experience of the Indians in respect of our elections or indeed ours in respect of any other country's of the region. It is not only the size and importance of India but also the overwhelming Indian presence in the media that makes the flow of information so one sided.

I felt this during a couple of recent visits to Nepal in connection with a SAARC meeting. Nepal is our close neighbour, at one point separated from us by not more than 50 kilometers of Indian territory. Yet, we seem to know so little about the happenings there. In fact a story narrated to an Indian editor by Dr. Delli Raman Regmi, an ex-Foreign Minister of Nepal and a renowned scholar has it that a section of the British Indian Military Command had, prior to India's independence, actually sounded out the Rana Prime Minister of Nepal as to his reaction about making the East Pakistan border contiguous with Nepal. However, the Prime Minister reportedly preferred to deal with one neighbour, i.e. India. In the South, rather than having two to deal with. This, he thought, would make life more difficult for Nepal-locked Nepal. He obviously did not foresee Nepal's advantage of direct access to the then East Pakistan ports. There is, however, no official backup of this story and in any case it is now at best a 'could have been' in the footnote of history.

Nepal has a much longer history as a modern independent state than Bangladesh. When Nepal was consolidated as a modern Kingdom in 1769, we had in the wake of the Battle of Plassey in 1757, slid under British hegemony on our way to becoming a part of the jewel in the British Crown! Notwithstanding this, after many vicissitudes, full blooded parliamentary system was established in our respective countries in the early nineties, when under public pressure, the Panchayat system gave way in Nepal, as did the Ershadian brand of democracy in Bangladesh. In 1991 Khaleda Zia was elected as Prime Minister. In May of the same year G.P. Koirala of the Nepalese Congress took over as the elected Prime Minister of Nepal.

In the last seven years, Bangladesh has had two parliamentary elections and the mockery of another, creating the fifth, sixth and seventh parliaments of the country. The fifth parliament functioned, if it ever did, largely without the opposition Awami League, the election to the sixth parliament was shunned by the opposition and the moribund seventh has now hopefully got a shot in the arm upon the return of the BNP to it after a boycott stretching six months. We have now in the country a supposed National Census Government which has, among others, two BNP Ministers, appointed without the knowledge, advice and consent of the BNP and a Jatiya Party minister, who, according to its chairman HM Ershad, should now quit. Such instances are indeed rare in parliamentary practice.

Parliamentary behaviour in Nepal bears the stamp of its own peculiarity. Intra-party squabbles there seem to influence the formation of Government more than anti-party alignments. All, however, is done apparently in good humour and without any fistfights and pitched battles with detached microphones and other projectiles inside the House, as has sadly been our experience in this region. This has however an uncharitable explanation. One may put forward the view that when a fight is totally devoid of principles and when it is pursued in enlightened self interest, discretion is usually regarded as the better part of valour, anger remaining only on the distant back of the mind.

The country has a bicameral legislature: a lower House of Representatives consisting of 205 members and an Upper House of 60 members. The Upper House is not involved in the formation of government. Nepal has had two general elections in its seven years parliamentary history, one in 1991 and the other in 1994. The 1994 election in Nepal produced a hung parliament with the United Marxist-Leninist Party CPN (UML) occupying 91 seats. The Nepalese Congress (NC) with 89 seats occupied the second position and the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) with 20 seats came third. A regional party called NSP held 3 seats and Independents 2, thus making a total of 205.

The present House of Representatives has so far seen four governments in many forms. The first was a minority government headed by Manmohan Adhikari that lasted only ten months. The Nepalese Congress which has all along been at daggers drawn with the RPP, conveniently buried its hatchet and got together with it to oust the Communists. It has to be stated here that if the Marxist-Leninist Party has any genuine socialist pretensions those are indeed well concealed. The Congress Prime Minister of the Congress-RPP coalition in this second government was however not the elderly G.P. Koirala but the much younger Sher Bahadur Deuba who had succeeded in rallying the majority of the party around him. Since the RPP with 20 seats held the balance of power, they wanted their share of the cake, which, in this case, meant ministerial berths for all 20 of them. Kamal Thapa of the RPP became the Foreign Minister in that cabinet.

The senior RPP leaders Lok Bahadur Chand and Surya Bahadur Thapa (present Prime Minister) are veterans of the game having held Prime Ministerial posts under the Panchayat system that lasted from the sixties through the eighties. They are indeed very old Special Pales (VSOP) in the new RPP bottle. Both of them, belonging to the party that held the balance of power, were quick to feel their own respective strengths. This is precisely why they could not stay together, for both of them nurtured Primeministerial ambitions and the country, unfortunately for them, could offer this only one at a time! As a result the party broke up into RPP and New RPP under the leadership of Lok Bahadur Chand and Surya Bahadur Thapa. Of the 20 of their stock, 11 joined the Chand group and the rest 9, 11 joined Surya Bahadur Thapa. In this somewhat fluid situation, the CPN (UML) brought a no-confidence motion against Deuba's coalition govern-

ment. In the confidence vote some of Deuba's RPP ministers voted against their own government, as did Kamal Thapa, the current Foreign Minister. It is said that in that situation money changed hands and that the going rate was as high as 2 crores of Nepalese Rupees per vote. But in spite of all their efforts the NCP (UML) failed to muster the required majority of 103 votes and the motion fell through, whereupon the RPP Ministers who had voted against the government tamely and without any hesitation, returned to it. This extraordinary parliamentary behaviour was found to be too much even by the current standard of Nepalese politics and the Prime Minister himself thought it proper to seek a vote of confidence. On this occasion he failed to get it, because all the RPP ministers now voted against their own coalition government.

This scenario produced a coalition of CPN (UML) and RPP (Chand faction), with Lokendra Bahadur Chand, heading a party of only 11 members as the Prime Minister. Kamal Thapa of this party again became the Foreign Minister. Lokendra Bahadur Chand's ambition for Prime Ministership was thus fulfilled; but alas only for a short period of six months. For, by then, Surya Bahadur Thapa, his arch enemy, succeeded in winning over the majority of RPP members on his side. A vote of no confidence was moved against the Chand government. The no confidence motion was passed and this time Surya Bahadur Thapa fulfilled his own ambition of becoming the Prime Minister. Coalescing with the Nepali Congress he formed the fourth government of the present House. Congress, the senior Coalition partners not only had to pay the price for this support by giving up the Prime Ministership but also the posts of Foreign and Finance Ministers. Curiously, Kamal Thapa was quick

on his feet this time as well in changing loyalty and again adorned the Foreign Ministerial chair! So again a splinter group of members, heeded the coalition with almost all its members getting cabinet posts. This government continues till today; but for reasons mentioned below seems to be have come to the end of its run.

However, in the meantime something else happened that not only created some excitement but also set a judicial precedent. About a couple of months ago Surya Bahadur Thapa, the current Prime Minister, anticipating a CPN (UML) - RPP(Chand group) sponsored no-confidence motion was quick to advise the King to dissolve the parliament and hold mid-term elections. On the same day 90 CPN(UML) - RPP(Chand group) members filed a petition to the King requesting him to call a special session of the parliament to vote upon their no-confidence motion against the government. The Nepalese Constitution has a provision that allows more than one-third of its members to request for such a reconvening of the Parliament in between regular sessions, but in view of these two simultaneous requests, one from the government and the other from the opposition, the king saw it fit to refer the matter to the Supreme Court. The Court by a controversial majority verdict ruled that the request of the opposition would have precedence over the advice of a Prime Minister, facing a no-confidence motion. The king therefore summoned the special session of the Parliament. This time, however, most of the RPP members of his faction stuck to him and Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa thus survived the no-confidence motion by getting just the required number of 103 votes in the House of 205. A few days later the Prime Minister narrowly escaped a plane crash raising appreciative speculations in a superstitious country about both his parliamentary durability and physical well-being.

But yet this superstition may be proved wrong as far as the PM's parliamentary durability is concerned, for there has lately been a political development that may change the power equation in the Nepalese Parliament. The CPL (UML), the major opposition party with 89 members have split into two factions of 40 and 49. Mr. Bamdev Gautam, a former Deputy Prime Minister of the CPN (UML) has caused this split by walking out of the CPN (UML) with 40 supporters and forming a Marxist-Leninist group called CPN(ML). Therefore the United Communist Party of Nepal i.e. CPN(UML), which had amply displayed its Non-Marxist-Leninist tendencies earlier has now demonstrated that it is not 'United' either. The CPN(ML), perhaps with an eye to the next elections, has been making anti-Indian noises, protesting against the terms of Nepal's Water Treaty with India. But it is taken by the political observers, by and large, as no more than a stance to gain some popularity among the masses, sections of which nurture a latent anti-India sentiment, mainly due to the strong and visible Indian presence in that country.

A beneficiary of this development is the Nepalese Congress, which has now emerged as the largest party in the parliament, having the prerogative of being the first to be called upon to form a government in case the present Coalition government led by it collapses. For Surya Bahadur Thapa, the present prime Minister, and his arch rival Lok Bahadur Chand, the happy days of taking their turns of becoming Prime Minister seem to be over. For their RPP factions no longer hold the balance of power. The split among the Communists has opened up possibilities for the Congress either to team up with one of its two factions or to dictate, for the first time, its own terms to its RPP Coalition partners, be it the Tweedle dum of Lok Bahadur Chand or the Tweedle dee of Sher Bahadur Deuba.

There are also speculations as to who will be the next Prime Minister in a Congress led government — G.P. Koirala or the younger Sher Bahadur Deuba. I met the latter in Kathmandu recently and asked him about his prospects. With an enigmatic smile he said that being only 52 compared to Mr. Koirala's 75 years he was "not in a hurry". But then one did not know what the smile concealed! I also met Foreign Minister Kamal Thapa and could not help the temptation of making a remark about his propensity of surviving in all kinds of Coalition situations. He avoided a direct answer, but with the experience and confidence of a three time Foreign Minister, reassured me that no matter who came to power in his country, Nepal will forever remain steadfast in its friendship with Bangladesh.



Frankly Speaking...

by Faruq Choudhury

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To the Editor...

South African TV commentators

Sir, I wish to extend my felicitations to the Pakistan team for their magnificent win over the South Africans in the second Test at Kingsmead.

But what left a rather bad taste in the mouth was the one-sided criticism of the visitors by the SA TV commentators. Nothing seemed to escape their wrath — including the appeals for LBWs or catches by the Pakistanis! The umpiring was of the highest standard; and yet the SA commentators invariably

tried to leave a doubt whenever a decision went against the South Africans!

Ashfaq Choudhury House No. 8, Road No. 37, Gulshan, Dhaka-1212

Wanted: Dustbin container

The Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital situated at the north-west corner of the Road No. 6, Dhanmondi along the Dhanmondi Police Station, had been facing environmental hazards and pollution for lack of a

container dustbin. The residents dispose of the wastes at this corner just north of the Hospital gate along the Mirpur Road. The wastes on the road-corner are strewn and scattered by the rush of vehicular movement and at times, create intolerable foul smell, posing health hazards for people and patients. Waste disposal by the DCC authorities is irregular and perfunctuous when cleaning is not done appropriately. Well? Do the needful. M/Rub? Do the needful. Public Relations Officer Gonoshasthaya Kendra, Dhaka

Remembering Sheikh Mujib — a Young and Dynamic Minister

by M. Matul Islam

An autonomous type corporate body for the development of small scale industry was a novel idea in those days. After Sheikh Mujib made a beginning with this successful experiment in East Pakistan, West Pakistan followed suit and created the West Pakistan Small Industries Corporation.

WITH the fall of United Front Government of Abu Hossain Sarkar in 1956, Ataur Rahman Khan formed the Awami League Government in East Pakistan and Sheikh Mujib, Captain Monsur Ali, Manoranjan Dhar and few other prominent Awami League leaders joined the Cabinet of Ataur Rahman Khan. Sheikh Mujib was given the portfolio of Commerce, Labour and Industries, popularly known as the Department of C & I which also looked after power and electricity, there being no separate department for power or electricity in the then East Pakistan Government.

I was then working as Under Secretary, Department of Finance, having joined there a year earlier. I had known Sheikh Mujib as a fire-brand politician who spent years in jail for his views as an opposition activist, but had no personal acquaintance with him.

During that period, Dhaka Electric Supply Company was in private hands and was managed by Messrs Octavious Steel

Dept. of Finance. In this capacity, I was also responsible to handle all loan negotiations with the Government of Pakistan including release of developmental funds from the centre to the provincial government.

Loan negotiation with the Ministry of Finance, Government of Pakistan, was an uphill task and obtaining release of funds was a nightmare. It was a frustrating experience for a young officer like me to take the long journey to Karachi almost every month and return most of the time empty handed.

One morning, as I was looking into urgent messages from the Government of Pakistan, I got the surprise of my life with the contents of a sanctioning letter which said that the Ministry of Finance was pleased to sanction Rs. 1 crore for a Film Development Corporation and another Rs. 1 crore for creating of corporation for the development of small scale industry in East Pakistan.

It was quite clear that some unseen hands had worked behind the scene to obtain

foundation for a modern film industry in this part of the world 40 years ago.

In September 1957, I left for Harvard University (Cambridge) for higher studies and developed close friendship with Prof. Munier Chowdhury who was studying linguistics at the same university. He lived in a small flat with his wife Lily Chowdhury and son Bhason. Prof. Chowdhury informed me that Sheikh Mujib, who had by this time left the Government and took over as the Secretary General of the Awami League party, was coming to Boston for medical treatment. We both went to the Boston Logan Airport and received Sheikh Mujib who had come there for a major stomach surgery at the Boston General Hospital.

Sheikh Mujib was all alone in a foreign country for undergoing a major surgery and therefore we decided that, between me and Prof. Chowdhury, we should take time, in between studies, to be by his hospital bedside as much as possible. After about a week, Sheikh Mujib was released from the hospi-



Sheikh Mujib with Munier Chowdhury, the writer and others at the Harvard University campus.

a British Company with their main office in Chittagong and the commercial office of Dhaka Electric Supply located on Abdullah Gani Road adjacent to the East Pakistan Secretariat. I got the first taste of Sheikh Mujib's bold decision making style when one day, while traveling to the Secretariat in a rickshaw, I noticed a contingent of armed constables surrounding the commercial office of Dhaka Electric Supply and on reaching office learnt that Sheikh Mujib, in one sweep, has taken over management of the Dhaka Electric Supply from Messrs Octavious Steel on allegations of grave mismanagement and that I have been entrusted with the responsibility of making detailed investigation into the charges of mismanagement and corruption. It dawned on me that it was not for nothing that Sheikh Mujib had earned the reputation as a fire-brand politician who clearly knew his priorities. I was more than convinced that more such surprises are in the offing.

A few days after this episode, I was promoted as Additional Deputy Commissioner and was posted to Rangpur where I spent only six months and again was sent back to the Secretariat as Financial Adviser (Development) and Deputy Secretary, Department of Finance, a key position created by the Government to bring sanctioning of all development expenditure under one officer in the

overnight sanction and simultaneous release of funds for two corporate bodies about which neither the Planning Department nor the Dept. of Finance were aware of. To me it was a miracle and I knew that none other than Sheikh Mujib was capable of performing such miracles.

The film industry in East Pakistan during that period was non-existent. One or two bold producers have tried in vain with Bengali production but with little or no success. Sheikh Mujib realized that for production of good Bengali films, the industry needed government patronage and support, needed production facilities and well-equipped studios etc. without which the field would remain wide open for Urdu films from West Pakistan.

An autonomous type corporate body for the development of small scale industry was a novel idea in those days. After Sheikh Mujib made a beginning with this successful experiment in East Pakistan, West Pakistan followed suit and created the West Pakistan Small Industries Corporation.

Today, perhaps not many people are aware of Sheikh Mujib's contribution to the development of film industry in East Pakistan. I do not know whether Sheikh Hasina when she recently announced her government's support for a film city, knew that it was her illustrious father who had laid the

tal and moved into Munier Chowdhury's one bed-room apartment and occupied a corner of the 10 ft. by 12 ft. living room. He could not afford the cost of recuperating in a hotel. It was during this period that I came very close to him and many a time he and Munier Chowdhury would reminisce about their life in the Dhaka Central Jail. Lily Chowdhury was an excellent hostess.

The Harvard Group, with Dean Mason, David Bell, Gus Papanek etc. were keen to meet Sheikh Mujib and it fell on me to arrange the meeting. Sheikh Mujib was greatly impressed by the interest and in-depth knowledge that this group had about Pakistan's politics and economy. It was this Harvard Group that came out openly to condemn the genocide perpetrated by the Pakistani Army after the crackdown in 1971.

It was evident that Sheikh Mujib was on a tight budget but it did not deter him to shower an expensive gift on Munier Chowdhury's son at the time he left Harvard. Even with a limited pocket, Mujib carried with him a large heart.

The love and affection that developed between me and Sheikh Mujib during those Harvard days came to an end when the cruel hands of destiny abruptly removed the great man from our midst.

The writer is a former Finance Secretary.

OPINION

For an Otolaryngological Institute

Dr Kallyan Kishore

The first SAARC ENT congress organized by Society of Otolaryngologists and Head-Neck Surgeons of Bangladesh has been held in Dhaka recently. Participation by a good number of foreign delegates from more than twelve countries was really satisfactory and reflective of the importance of this area of medical science.

Ear, Nose and Throat are three important passages lying in neighbourhood of brain which are very much vulnerable to foreign invasion and hence, ailment. Because of poor socioeconomic condition and some specialities of our physical and social environment the incidence of ENT diseases is reasonably higher in our country than others. More than 20 per cent patients attending the OPD (out patient department) of a general hospital indicate ENT and related diseases and more than 40 per cent of which belongs to the age group between 1-15 years.

Laryngeal cancers constitute about 13 per cent of all cancers of the body. Oral and pharyngeal cancers have the highest incidence in this region because of some social factors playing a role in its causation. The status of the Ear is probably the worst. CSOM, a chronic suppurative condition of Ear, alone is re-

sponsible for 30 per cent of all ENT diseases which is most prevalent in children and capable of giving rise to various complications including deafness and brain abscess.

The air we breathe in through nose, the food we take in through mouth and the sound passing through our ears are often not much fresh we know well, and hence the organs concerned are always prone to develop diseases particularly in our present status of marked environmental pollution where the 'triad' of ENT is the most vulnerable victim.

What I intend to say is, in spite of increasing demand, standard of treatment in this area has failed to reach the optimum level of expectation. A good number of post graduate specialists have been produced in recent years and by dint of sincerity of a few of our teachers spectrum of performance has also been made broader, but still not adequate particularly when it is thought in our own perspective.

In his speech a foreign doctor passed the comment that a single operating microscope can save hundreds of children from being deaf per year. But it's regrettably true that such a

modern microscope is still not in use of our ENT doctors in spite of their utmost ardour and enthusiasm.

Regarding ENT diseases what we have to keep in mind is that the incidence is high in our country affecting predominantly the children, and most of the patients belong to the poor class. Besides, treatment procedure in many cases is very complex or difficult to perform. So, it is easily understandable that the standard of treatment in private sector is difficult to be elevated which can demand special attention or preference from the government side. Moreover, the role of microsurgery, laser and cryosurgery is of growing importance in this field, and not only that, a large number of cancer patients are there to be dealt with everytime.

Taking these factors into account a demand can come up naturally for a separate well-equipped otolaryngological institute which is probably an immediate need for high quality specialized treatment and research. Such an institute will not only be enriching for the field but a significant role will also be played by it to assist many people in making frequent foreign visits for better treatment.