

Sabotaging the Nation

Lights went out on June 20 night. It seemed all the lights of the world were put off together. Unrelieved darkness enveloped the city and the jet black that we dipped into was full of forebodings.

The panic and disgust caused by the disaster was so forceful that the government had to institute an enquiry into the incident. At the time, we in these columns tried to be fair to the government and blamed the blackout on the very bad state of our generation and distribution systems of power as also on the unsatisfactory position of gas supply to the turbines.

The enquiry report is now in, a month later than stipulated. And it comes as a revelation. For it places most of the responsibility of the June 20 blackout not on mechanical failure or technical inadequacy but on sheer neglect and carelessness on the part of PDB personnel.

At one stage of the brewing crisis the Prime Minister put the power plants under army supervision. At another an exasperated PM sacked the energy minister. Nothing helped and the situation only got worse.

Shame on BCB

Bangladesh Cricket Board has 'punished' Gordon Greenidge, the West Indian coach of the national team, for speaking his mind to the press. A rather long interview with The Daily Star where this master opening batsman of the yesteryears gave vent to his frustration at Board's failure in making optimal use of his experience and expertise.

Actually the BCB people are hoist with their own petard. They failed to live up to the mouthful of promises they made to sustain the interest that was generated in the country after the ICC success through their own efficiency and are now trying to pass the buck on Greenidge.

Narrow Squeak for Biman

It is really alarming in the manner in which Bangladesh Biman is muddling through. It is sheer good luck that we have not heard of any major disaster yet. A report in a leading Bangla daily yesterday informed us how an aircraft on an international flight recently made a narrow squeak.

If the authorities do not intervene now to bring a semblance of system, order and accountability, things might fall apart. We urged the authorities for firm corrective measure before.

By all reckoning the recently-concluded visit of President Bill Clinton to China has been the decade's biggest political spectacle. Both the President and his host wanted to make it a show befitting the newly-emerging US-China trans-Pacific strategic and business partnership.

Throughout Clinton presidency, the US-China relationship has been far from easy. Not only it was bumpy from the outset, it had to encounter numerous roadblocks. Only until last year the term applied to the US-China policy was 'containment'.

How was that turn-around made possible? After the cold war the US had been rather comfortably saddled at the apex of an unipolar world. She demonstrated her awe-inspiring power during the Gulf War and proclaimed a world order of her own design in its wake.

Eagle in the Clasp of Dragon!

The US increasingly finds herself straight-jacketed in a situation where she desperately needs Beijing's cooperation to deal with any problem in international system — be it the weaponised nuclear stand off in South Asia, the tension in Korean Peninsula, Cambodia or drug trafficking and peddling in weapon and technology for mass destruction.



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

of the world. Within a decade that power has reached its elastic limit. The cross-currents of international politics do bring predicaments even for the mightiest at times.

In post-cold war world the US does not anymore wield undisputed authority. Even the allies question her authority now, when their interests are hurt. Her grip has worsened over the countries in the EU who are going to introduce Euro to compete with American currency more forcefully.

The post-cold war realities are such that Washington is in dire need of a cooperative framework of operationalisa-

former's critical juncture the issues standing between Beijing and Washington were formidable. Prominent among the issues of conflict between them were of human rights, religious freedom, forced abortion, freedom of Tibet apart from all important nuclear and missile technology transfer.

It was obvious that the tone of the visit was set by the host. The stark reality was that neither the US wanted to take

tough stand on the issues nor did China really care. Beijing had been perfecting the art of cold soldiering the US allegation for last several years and during the visit, the US enamoured with China's mega-market and with her new found enthusiasm for China wanted to ignore or overlook many of the Chinese lapses and tried to find excuses for Beijing's difficulties in its compliance.

The persistent Chinese response to US demands on various issues had been that its accession to them would depend on the cessation of American arms sales to Taiwan, need for China to preserve the exchange rate of the yuan to dollar and American vote in China's favour in the IMF, World Bank and WTO.

Even such 'misdemeanors' of China were overlooked by the US who was magnanimous enough to preserve its currency

exchange rate for China in spite of Asian economy undergoing convulsion. China's human rights violations were swept under carpet.

Apparently, Mr Clinton had of late been following a policy of appeasement towards China lest it would shut off its mega-market to American business. Instead of tough responses to China's recalcitrant posture, Clinton tended to simply look the other way.

As an immediate outcome of the visits of both the presidents \$60 bn seemed to have been secured for the US business for 40 nuclear plants which would be built in China by 2000.

During Jiang's visit his first port of call was Hawaii. The real purpose was to demonstrate at Pearl Harbour a shared past of both the US and China of being subjected to Japanese aggression during the second world war.

It is remoured during the visit that a campaign contribution of \$100,000 by the China Aerospace Corporation funded to the Democratic party in the US was a factor in lifting sanction against the satellite sale.

The network of US-China business lobby is so dense and widespread that whoever occupies the White House succumbs to its persuasion. As a matter of fact there is growing lobby in the US to argue against any kind of sanction against China.

From the Clinton's China visit and its outcome, it seems the incumbent US President has fallen in line with arguments of this lobby.

Sovereignty at Risk

The only solution for a democratic PM like Mian Nawaz Sharif to limit sovereign risk is to widen and deepen the democratic process through the broad spectrum of government from Local Bodies upto the Federal Cabinet. Our national unity is fragmenting because of the lack of people's participation in governance at every level.

The obvious uncertainty pervading the country is whether the intense artillery duel across the Line of Control (LOC) in Kashmir will escalate into a battle localized to that area or into a full-scale war between India and Pakistan.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) made some incursions, however, that came to nought except for their helicopter gunships strafing civilian targets. IAF Chief Air Marshal Sareen, visiting Kashmir, brushed aside the "Guns of August" as a "seasonal thing".

Pakistan went through a very uncertain period after the May 11 Indian blasts. In this day and age, for a country to threaten another with nuclear war and annihilation is rather extraordinary.

While it took courage to face upto the western world, particularly a disapproving US, the Nawaz Sharif Government unfortunately had not taken concrete steps to cope with the sanctions threatened by the

West. While one could concede that pre-blast such steps could not be made public, at least the government should have had a gameplan which could have been well thought out before implementation. Not only was this lacking but post-blast the government got caught up in the general euphoria and instead of consolidating its gains, mainly national unity, it went ahead and announced dramatic political and economic initiatives.

The net result of bad policy initiatives is that not only has it put the Mian Nawaz Sharif regime at risk but also the nation's sovereignty. While our economic scenario is desperate, a resilient parallel economy is keeping us afloat. Even at the end of our survival tether, the official rate of exchange has depreciated by 2-3 per cent.

and political keel. To forestall further deterioration, the Government is going through with a cabinet re-shuffle. Going by the track record of the Sharif brothers, this changeover will be used to stifle the remaining dissent in the Cabinet.

With the nation in a state of virtual internal collapse, the Indian firing across the LOC has helped to stabilize the situation. Domestically, Mian Nawaz Sharif has nothing to fear from a fragmented opposition.

likely to occur. Amazingly the only bold initiatives taken by the Sharifs were of personal vendetta, that they could find time to indulge in this exercise while the nation is at risk is at the very least, astonishing.

the credibility of those advising it as well as to the Army becoming part of the problem rather than solving the problem. The Army cannot afford to get bogged down internally at this time. It is already involved in Karachi by proxy through the Rangers and is deeply worried about the drying up of funds.

AS I SEE IT  
Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

PML (N) and PPP lose their leaders to third parties. The only "political" party left is the Army and fortunately for Mian Nawaz Sharif, despite the consensus availing from the unit and formation Monthly Security Intelligence Reports (MSIRs), particularly the column labelled "Morale-Military" and "Morale-Civilians", the present hierarchy is extremely professional and disinclined from Napoleonic advent.

the Army being drawn inexorably into the governance process and in the end may find themselves operating more than the usual remote control buttons despite the COAS's best intentions.

Mian Nawaz Sharif's regime will not be able to withstand any further major faux pas in the prevailing environment. There is always a fall-safe line between democratic process and

autocratic government in any third world country, if the PM brings autocracy into his government it may well soon be replaced by more authoritative autocracy in the country. He cannot juggle both and get away with consequences thereof. The only solution for a democratic PM like Mian Nawaz Sharif to limit sovereign risk is to widen and deepen the democratic process through the broad spectrum of government from Local Bodies upto the Federal Cabinet.

OPINION GOVERNANCE

The Fundamental Issue

Firdous Murshid

Governance is perhaps the latest buzz-word that has hit our shores. Even the Prime Minister has had to nod to it with great deference, in a recent conference. The Bible tells us that in the beginning was the Word. So it would appear that just by uttering the appropriate magic words in all earnest and great passion, we could usher in an era of transparency, accountability and efficiency in our national institutions — at least until such time as a new buzz-word is imported!

I am all for great ideas and grand concepts. I have absolutely no problem with people who want to re-invent or modify the wheel. I have great respect for the grand oral tradition of our policy makers, academics and leaders of civil society — because clearly, if we are not able to articulate the problem, reveal all its complex intricacies and arouse and mould public opinion in the right direction, we are not going to be able to make a dent in the black-box of governance.

In an ideal situation, the best governance regime is paradoxically, one where there is no need for governance. Consider a world where society is essentially self-regulated, all members are law-abiding, where the rules of conduct are well-known and where non-compliance with rules and social norms do not occur.

Where does this then lead us? We have to go behind the factors that have made us lawless. We have to rule by example. We need to instill respect for the law. We need to be reminded of the importance of driving on the left side of the road. We need to change our attitudes and engender respect if not love, for fellow mortals.

horn or drive your truck in your sleep). Yes, it does seem like an impossible dream, but does point to an important point: good governance is much more closely related to attitude, behaviour, education, culture and norms rather than to the size of the police force, the number of commissions, committees and task forces, and the legal/judicial framework. However, much of the discussion on governance that we hear relates precisely to the latter, less relevant issues. Thus, the fundamental challenge is to promote, collective, cooperative action and build on appropriate cultural practices and norms (before these disappear completely from our midst).

Murder of Rubel and the subsequent and ongoing attempts to cover-up, deny, justify a criminal act by a state institution, probably does not help engender love and respect.

To the Editor...

Fresh non-fat milk

Sir, Nowadays fresh whole milk is available for people of Dhaka city in sealed plastic packs. Suppliers have done a good job for which citizens can get unadulterated fresh milk everyday.

However, fresh non-fat milk is not available in the market. This is causing difficulty for old people who cannot take whole-cream milk due to health condition. Presently they have to depend on imported powdered non-fat milk which is expensive and the quality is not dependable.

I would therefore request the milk producers to produce limited quantity of non-fat milk and start supplying in Dhaka city. Once this milk is available at a reasonable price, old people will start purchasing this product. Gradually the consumption will go up and it can be marketed in other large cities like Chittagong, Khulna etc.

Observing August 15 Sir, August 15 is a remarkable date in Bangladesh not because it was the birth day of Khaleda Zia (as claimed by her) but for a reason known to everybody. That very familiar was not at all a happy one, instead it was a very very sad incident in the history of Bangladesh.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the very founder of the Independent Bangladesh was brutally killed in the early morning of the 15th of August, 1975 by our own soldiers, believably not of their own will but by both national and international conspiracy.

War, while Ziaur Rahman was one of the three Chiefs of three special forces. I may be wrong and if so the readers are requested to correct my notion. If I am right at least in regarding Sheikh Mujib as the Organizer of our Independence Movement and thus the Founder of Independent Bangladesh (the war was fought after the declared commandment of him), then my urge to every Bangladeshi is to observe August 15 as our national Mourning Day.

Agri-education Sir, According to the press reports, academic activities including research of the Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU), Mymensingh were being facing setback due to inadequate budget allocation for the current fiscal year. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has approved Tk. 35 crore as budget to BAU for fiscal '98-99 against the demand of Tk. 46 crore.

33.20 crore while Tk. 1.80 crore will be earned from the University's own sources. It is a known fact that the government has undertaken some pragmatic steps for bringing about changes in higher agricultural education with a view to strengthen the country's agro-based economy through creating an educated and skilled farming community. Some Agri-colleges have been declared to be upgraded while one agri-university has been set up.

Can the nation expect at least some discussion on the day on the life and unnatural demise of Sheikh Mujib from our present opposition party (the ever biggest opposition in Bangladesh politics)?

MAS Molla Member, BAAS, Dhaka.

At a time when the higher agri-educational institutions in the public sector have devoted themselves in the task of producing skilled, scientific manpower for raising productivity in the agri-sector at par with the government strategies, the inadequate budget allocation for BAU will undoubtedly hamper the academic and research activities of the university.

M Zahidul Haque BAI, Dhaka-1207.

Democracy in India

Sir, India happens to be one of the largest democratic country in the world. But recently a number of people were protesting against a play about a man who assassinated Gandhi and where the assassin was glorified. If the play was cleared by the State Sensor Board, then why bother? If the Indians practice democracy then they have nothing to fear.

Let people be the judge. Shagor Dhaka