

Be a Civil Service

Even in an age when the economy is being progressively de-regulated and privatised, the civil administration and other wings of the government remain important factors in governance and development. In this context, the quality, efficiency and dedication to duty of civil service personnel at all levels assume critical importance.

The growth of 'associations' does not, perhaps, go against the spirit of the law, since civil servants also need such groups to look after their collective welfare. However, according to a list published in this paper yesterday, there are over 50 such 'associations', which have increasingly been playing the role of trade unions, including launching 'action programmes' and the like.

Ideals of good governance and rapid development would remain elusive without an efficient civil service. But if this service is also hamstrung from within, then the government is likely to struggle to implement its policies and programmes. Therefore, the government has a major interest in ensuring that civil servants, — whether high-flying Secretaries or lowly clerks — do not engage in activities that hamper working atmosphere.

Good for South Asia

More than their differences on core issues it is the small positive signals beamed by India and Pakistan in their recent talks that should merit emphasis. For, if they can build on such good tidings the circle of positivism is likely to expand with a possible sympathetic shrinkage in the circle of negativism they have so far only seen to snowball.

The two most auspicious pieces of news to flow from New Delhi and Islamabad are: a regular bus service is going to operate between Lahore and New Delhi and that they have decided to step up border trade. These are clear-cut steps towards bilateral normality.

Actually, by past standards, a sea-change has occurred in the atmospheres of the two subcontinental grants, India and Pakistan, to enable them to engage themselves in a continuing process talks. No forward foothold could be reached in the two rounds they held at the foreign and defence secretaries' levels on nuclear concerns, Kashmir question and Siachen dispute, yet in a marked departure from previous occasions they have not abandoned the course of dialogue in a huff.

Will Dhaka Crumble?

The physical stability of the city of Dhaka depends much on the ground water table beneath the city. This common knowledge was specially underlined when ground water started being lifted in amounts threatening the table. From the biggest organisation in the country, namely the government, to the smallest social unit, the family to wit, are all busy meeting the exigencies that each new day brings.

Leaders of the Diploma Engineers Association on Thursday told a rally of WASA personnel that a supply system based on surface water should be built up as the present ground-water based system may endanger the natural equilibrium of the capital city. More explicitly, they said if the present arrangement continues, Dhaka will be in the serious danger of toppling.

Coming from WASA's technical people, the warning should wake us up. We are not certain if the government should also be needing to be awakened. There is no sign as yet that it has even thought of making a switch from the ground to the surface water supply system. The Syedabad water treatment plant remains on the drawing board.

Lifting ground water needn't perhaps be altogether stopped. There must be a balance between how much water goes into the ground and how much is withdrawn. This is not there now. And no one perhaps knows what is the situation down there. This forced ignorance about one's life and death question is unacceptable.

We urge upon the government to publish a white paper on the situation. We know it shies of things like white paper or taking the people into confidence. Even so, we demand one. The problem is, unlike some others, both urgent and important. There must be a permanent monitoring facility to read and report the ground water situation. Or someday, God forbid, the alarmists will perhaps take over.

A Glow on Their Face

The communities feel satisfied, even feel elated, that the bomb has given India and Pakistan a status, which the world grudgingly recognises. It has proved that when it comes to nuclear and space technology, they are inferior to none.

It is very difficult to convince the West that there is substantial resentment against the bomb in India and Pakistan. The media gave the impression that the peoples in both the countries were euphoric over the 'achievement'. This has stayed uncorrected. I picked up the same signals in the UK, the US and Canada, which I visited recently to participate in seminars in the three countries.

As a critic of the bomb, the observation that galvanized me was that it was exploded to divert the attention from poverty. Domestic compulsions were there but not the West-romanticised poverty, which is a stark reality in the subcontinent. The reasons for explosion were different.

For example, the BJP thought that it would reap political dividends and increase its strength in the next Lok Sabha. Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif did not need more seats in the National Assembly because he had already a two-thirds of strength. But he was losing popularity. India's explosion gave him the reason to detonate the bomb so as to retrieve his image.

It is a different story that neither the BJP nor the Nawaz Sharif Muslim League reaped any dividends. The first lost whatever ground it had gained when Islamabad exploded the bomb. The second came a cropper when the economic disaster followed. It was really domestic politics that dictated the judgment.

True, nuclear tests should not have taken place because there was no immediate security compulsion. Even other-

wise, when the subcontinent has been against the bomb, why it should have committed the same mistake, which it wanted the world not to make. But the West's argument that the bomb in the hands of third world countries is unsafe smacks of arrogance. Washington has, in fact, gone crazy. It has barred even the entry of science students from India. I got a clear indication in America that it will continue to chastise New Delhi for a long time to come.

However, it looks that Pakistan will be treated softly. But it may have to pay a heavy price. Some knowledgeable sources in the US told me that President Bill Clinton would ask Nawaz Sharif at the meeting in December to extend recognition to Israel. Economic package is going to have a political wrapper.

America's attitude of haughtiness has, however, made both Indians and Pakistanis living abroad more determined about spanning the distance between the two countries. Two students, one from India and the other from Pakistan, came up to me after I finished my speech at Minneapolis in the US. They are friends. They wanted to know how they could help the subcontinent to bury the hatchet while living abroad. They were worried over the rise of Hindu chauvinism in India and Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan.

This does not, however, mean that the communities

from these countries have said goodbye to communalism. But events back home have disillusioned them a bit. They expected something different, something liberal.

Most Hindus in the UK and the US are still pro-BJP. But the party's gloss has come off to some extent. They expected the Atal Behari Vajpayee government to perform better and they are disappointed that it has not done so even in the seven to eight months of its rule. The

Sharif government's declaration to run the country according to Shariat has not been to their liking. They say they are already Muslims. So, why should anybody doubt their belief and try to convey to them that their faith in Islam was lessening.

I also met some Bangladeshis in Canada and America. They are distressed over the rise of fundamentalism in their country. The perennial differences between

South Asian region, or indeed in any state throughout the whole world. Ethnicity and religion can both be divided and sub-divided ad infinitum. Numerous examples are cited both in the Muslim and the Christian worlds in support of this statement. Moreover, religious divides can cut across common religion. Spoken languages, written scripts and other cultural attributes further sub-divide people.

Whether it is because of their living in the West or because of the fundamentalists making a mess of governance in the subcontinent, they increasingly believe that secularism is one solution — a political system, which transcends religious and ethnic divides. Secularism suffers from being equated with irreligion and materialism is difficult to operate and appears to have failed to prevent ethnic and religious conflict in South Asia.

The conclusion from this failure, they infer, is not to abandon secularism. The more difficult it is in the face of religious and ethnic fragmentation, the more necessary it is to persist in making secularism and tolerance work. The alternative to the politics of secularism, it is conceded, is the politics of fear that lies at the heart of the conflicts and violence provoked by religious and ethnic divisions. People of different cultures must live together in peace, whether in one state or many. There is no alternative

because terrorism, war and genocide solve nothing and indeed only escalate fear and hatred.

Apart from religious divides, poverty in the subcontinent is a millstone around the neck of the three countries. People in the West chide them about it and consider them incapable of solving their problem in their own countries. The communities are so much on the defensive that they readily suffer the instances of racism, increasing in the US and the UK. I got the feeling that despite the discrimination they face because they are non-Whites, they have developed a vested interest in living abroad. The quality of life, far better from what prevails in the subcontinent, has made the communities slave to it, apart from the opportunities of gainful employment.

"You want the bomb when you do not have enough to feed your population," is one comment thrown at the communities from the subcontinent again and again. They concede that there is some truth in what is said. They realise that more than half the population in their countries goes without meals at least one time in the day. Still, the communities feel satisfied, even feel elated, that the bomb has given India and Pakistan a status, which the world grudgingly recognises. It has proved that when it comes to nuclear and space technology, they are inferior to none. And since the world recognises the bomb as the symbol of strength, the communities have a glow on their face when they talk of nuclear tests in their countries.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

earlier fanatic Hindu stand has softened, except in website Internet, where the expression of fanaticism is still strident. The debate that Hindutva is synonymous for secularism is picking up again. What it means is that they have realised that extreme religious views do not sell in democratic countries like America, the UK and Canada.

The Pakistanis are afraid that the Taliban-type Islam may engulf their country. We are the next, many say, some recall the threat given to women in Peshawar not to move outdoors. The Nawaz

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and former Prime Minister Khawaja Zia are seen not only as a political fight but also an opportunity, whenever the opportunity arises, to instigate religious frenzy. In fact, the community, which is working very hard to have a place under the sun, is exasperated over the wrangling between two women," as they put it.

There is, however, a growing feeling in the communities from all the three countries that the concept of a nation-state based on a common ethnicity and common religion is unrealistic whether in the

Cricket May Correct the Politically Incorrect

Cricket can be used to improve the political climate in the tension-ridden South Asia more effectively because people find greater interactions in cricket and sports arena regardless of the nature of the bilateral ties with a particular country.

WHEN present Indian prime minister Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was an opposition leader after a stint as the external affairs minister of the country, he took credit by claiming that the India-Pakistan cricket series in both countries were the result of the foreign policy pursued by the government of which he was the foreign minister. Obviously, he was referring to the Janata party government.

His critics had little answer to what Mr. Vajpayee had claimed at that time. Today when Mr. Vajpayee is at the zenith of his career by becoming the head of the government of the country, he is faced with a big political challenge in the form of seeing India's arch-rival Pakistan having the atomic bombs. Mr. Vajpayee was prime minister before, but for too long a term which hardly says that he was in the helm of India except for record purpose. Now that he has been in his position for eight months, the tit-for-tat nuclear explosions by India and Pakistan caused a major change in the political landscape in the South Asian region.

India which had already gained atomic power in 1974, improved it by several explosions in early May while Pakistan that was waiting in the wings towards possessing the power which India already had lost no time in having it through a series of explosions in the later part of the same month. The two countries had

always been at the loggerheads but their tensions exacerbated in the wake of both becoming nuclear power and, of late, efforts are continuing to lessen the tensions through meetings at different levels. But two sides agreed on a most popular event — their teams will play cricket matches. Both the nations are cricket crazy and their teams won world cup and any encounter between the two leaves one to wonder who would win.

This time, Pakistan will visit India soon and it is after a long gap. Not that the tour of the Pakistan team is trouble-free in the sense that everybody in India are readily in a welcoming mood to receive them. At least, the mood is different with the Shiv Sena, a partner of the two-party coalition government in the important state Maharashtra of which Mumbai is the capital. The other party that makes up the state government in the state is the BJP of Mr. Vajpayee. But the federal government seems to have put its foot down on the issue and said all steps would be taken for smooth tour of Pakistan team to India.

The BJP, particularly of its hard-line section, is known as politically hostile to traditionally belligerent neighbour but took a different view about cricket match. It is because they know that acting against India-

Pakistan cricket match would amount losing popularity very quickly. Cricket can be used to improve the political climate in the tension-ridden South Asia more effectively because people find greater interactions in cricket and sports arena regardless of the nature of the bilateral ties with a particular country.

The recent Wills Cup cricket

Test-playing nations, telecast by the WorldTel to many countries, Bangladesh was very much the cynosure of many eyes for staging the event and this has gone well for the country. This nation is not a Test-playing side as yet, and hence it could not take part in the recent Wills cup cricket international — although Bangladesh and two other non-Test-playing coun-

dium whose audience enthralled more the teams like West Indies, Australia, England, India and others over the days. People here still vividly remember Wasley Hall, Rohan Kanhai, Richi Benaud, Neil Harvey, Ken Barrington, Nari Contractor, Subhash Gupte and Abbas Ali Baig and many others from the visiting teams.

Bangladesh is in quest of gaining its Test status, and obviously we have to wait till such time that our side play Test matches on our grounds. However, we had the chance of watching India and Pakistan along hosts Bangladesh in the Independence cup one-dayers early this year.

Undeniably, a big section of the fans here was somewhat disappointed that India, Pakistan and even the Sri Lanka — three South Asian teams failed to reach the finals. This shows that cricket enhances the goodwill for the fellow regional countries against whom otherwise one may be critical on different grounds. It goes without saying that India and Pakistan are the two principal architects of the South Asian scene and much of the tensions in the region stems from their rivalry. A country like Bangladesh which strives to maintain a kind of neutrality can be a venue for more frequent cricket games to

bolster the fellow South Asian feelings. The coming ACC cup to be participated by four top Asian cricket nations including this country in addition to India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka will be step in right direction although it may be delayed by the end of the next year. The successful organising capacity of the recent tournament added a fillip to this country and other cricket-playing countries as well may choose to play here given the opportunity. Those directly involved in the Wills cup ranging from hard-working State Minister for Sports Obaidul Kader, and efficient and articulate president of the Cricket Control Board Saber Hossain Chowdhury to the groundsmen in the field deserve credits for this.

I had the opportunity watching cricket tests between India and Pakistan in New Delhi way back in 1982-83 when political relations between the two countries were not good. But Pakistani players received big ovation from the crowd in the Feroz Shah Kotla ground. Same applies to Indian players in Pakistan. Now that the cricket has received a further boost from the Wills cup, this discipline can be used more substantially for improving the political environment in South Asia where relations among nations are often bedeviled by disputes. The policy-makers in the region, many of whom are sports lovers, can contribute to this end.



is a testimony how cricket can bring together South Asian nations meaningfully than any other event. During the tournament which was the greatest sporting extravaganza in the country, millions of people of the region has set their eyes on the television sets for the live coverage of the thrilling encounters.

Sports — particularly cricket fans across the world witnessed the cricket carnival here, dubbed as the 'Mini World Cup', and participated by all the nine

tries will play in the coming World Cup in England by virtue of their being at three top positions in the ICC trophy in Kuala Lumpur last year.

But the chance of hosting the event without being a participatory team has however been a great luck and opportunity. Because it has enabled the cricket fans to watch world cricket on our soil. Dhaka used to be a venue of one of three Test matches in the erstwhile Pakistan along with Lahore and Karachi, and it was Dhaka Sta-

To the Editor...

"Six-day fix" Sir, We are very glad to read the letter of M. Ali, published in the DS of 26.10.98, where he states, "We support the view of Md Razzak on the above subject." That is to have only one-day weekly holiday. However in my letter, published in the DS on 7.10.98, I had suggested that this weekly holiday be on Sunday as it used to be all along a few years ago when it was changed to Friday.

Md Razzak Sonadanga, Khulna

Stop immorality

Sir, We all know the bitter incidents of Jahangirnagar University. It was mainly due to the immoral conduct and culture of some students. The former VC of this institution also admitted this. So we should — and must — do something so that this immorality, oppression, crime, drug addiction etc., don't become a norm. A group of guardians are also very anxious about their daughters' safety and female education rate may decrease if it increases.

The government and university authority must take proper steps to stop immoral conduct on the campus and halls.

Tanim Dhaka

"Peace without real price..."

Sir, With reference to the article "Peace without Real Price, on Israeli Terms" by Dr. Fakrudin Ahmed in the DS on 4th November, 1998.

I completely disagree with the author about a "smaller" Israel being able to achieve "greater" peace. It was in fact the size of the fledgling nation which prompted the Arabs to unsuccessfully launch an attack during the independence struggle.

the region. if the Arab world is really keen on the welfare of the Palestinians, they could arrange to carve out a separate state from Jordan and the West Bank; keeping in mind that Jordan has a substantial Palestinian population.

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Ownership of public roads

Sir, Why some of us always blame the poor hawkers, vendors and rickshawpullers for traffic jams? Why don't we accuse the big fishes, shopkeepers and many others of illegally occupying roads for storing and displaying their goods and commodities on public thoroughfares? Why don't we bring the bus owners into book for parking their vehicles haphazardly and making 'U' turn here and there whimsically? Why the motor workshops have sprung up on the busy and crowded public roads carrying out all sorts of motor repair works obstructing movement of the traffic? Why the shopowners at Nawabpur Road store different heavy machinery and equipment on the public roads? Why the shopkeepers at Captain Bazar and Thattari Bazar place stools and benches in front of their shops and block the movement of members of the public? Why do the shopowners at New Market and Baitul Mukarram display electronic goods, children's bicycles, suitcases and many other merchandise obstructing the movement in the markets? Why has the DCC kept huge garbage tanks on the middle of the roads blocking the movement of traffic?

We wonder who is the owner of public roads? The government or the dishonest businessmen and miscreants? There is no law and order, no discipline, no sanctity and no proper use of public roads. Would the Ministry of Home Affairs, DCC and DMP kindly make the use of public roads useful for members of the public?

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GERMAN POLITICAL SCENE

Dramatic Change for a "New Beginning"

by A S M Nurunnabi

With Schroeder's Social Democratic Party having formed a coalition government with the Environmentalist Greens, issues of not just German interest but of world ecology, including the concern for shutting down nuclear power plants, are dramatically put under the spotlight.

A new era in German politics began when Gerhard Schroeder, a Social Democrat who defeated Chancellor Helmut Kohl in elections in September last on promises to modernise Germany after 16 years of conservative rule. Schroeder represents a new generation of politicians with little personal memory of World War II that feels at ease moving the seat of power back to Berlin despite the city's burden of association with Nazi Germany and the Prussian military state.

Schroeder, 54, will lead Germany into the 21st century and through some critical changes, including the government's move to Berlin and the adoption of the single European currency to replace the German mark. Schroeder and his Social Democrats have sealed an alliance with the environmentalist Greens party that pledges to put Germans back to work, make it easier for foreign residents to get citizenship and move towards shutting down nuclear power plants.

Schroeder's business-friendly reputation helped him win "New Centre" voters who previously mistrusted the left. But since his triumph in 27 September election, he has striven to strengthen the social welfare state. Schroeder has promised a "new beginning" after Kohl, Germany's longest serving chancellor of this century. Whose Christian Democrats suffered a crushing defeat after 16 years in power.

Schroeder's formal swearing in the office of Chancellor on the same day of his parliamentary confirmation constitutes a path-breaker for the Rhineland with reverberations likely to be felt in time across much of Europe. It is felt by observers that the European integrationist view has taken on a new dimension with the left-of-centre sweep across the continent embracing Germany into its fold with Schroeder's success on his social welfare state plank. As analysts view it, Germany being the largest and most powerful

economy in Europe, is due to be led by a leader who is not wedded to free market economy to the point of absolutism at the expense of legitimate welfare interests of the society. Schroeder seems poised for the adoption of a new blend of political economy comprising leftist agenda and pro-business concerns. He seems well-placed in a palpable way to disprove the conventional theory that a dichotomy exists between free market operations and equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities.

After the election victory by the Social Democrats, Green leaders swiftly grasped power at the national level for the first time, sealing a coalition pact after surprisingly smooth negotiations.

There were some interesting aspects of the present German political scene. The glory of a decisive victory over Helmut Kohl had not been Schroeder's to savour for himself. He had to share it with the man who stood aside to become the leader of the centre-left Social Democrats when it became obvious that Schroeder was more likely to win. Oskar Lafontaine, chairman of the Social Democrats (SDP), gave up his dream of becoming chancellor when he stepped aside for Schroeder — but he did not give up his power. The truth of this has become the most striking feature of the new German government.

While attention was focused on the historic arrival of Germany's most radical postwar politicians — the one-time environmentalist fundamentalists of the Green party — in government for the first time as junior coalition partner with the Social Democrats, Lafontaine was exacting his price for his self-sacrifice. He took on Germany's most powerful ministry and then added to its power by taking major parts of other ministries.

Lafontaine is also one of the most consistently headline socialists in democratic European politics. His power grab has al-

ready made German industry very nervous about the new governments. It is also felt that this dominant economic power in Europe, and the third-biggest economy in the world to be run by an old-fashioned socialist administration is likely to profoundly affect the prospects for the development of the European Union and the impact of the single European currency when it comes into operation.

Certainly, it is already clear that the new Schroeder-Lafontaine administration is to be fundamentally different to the Kohl Government, despite Schroeder's promise not to change too much too quickly.

Lately, Lafontaine gave a clear exposition of the priorities he would be pushing for Germany and for Europe. Priority number one, he said, was to get the international system back under control. He also called for priority to be given to co-ordinated action by the member countries of the European Union to deal with unemployment, suggesting there may be a need for moves to stimulate economic growth and calling for action to make sure wealthy Europeans are no longer able to avoid their tax-paying obligations. And, despite economists' warnings, Lafontaine signalled that he would be pushing for EU-wide minimum wages.

"Anyone who exploits people with starvation wages must be punished by imprisonment," he said.

It was a very different message to that of his predecessors and may the beginning of a profound change in both Germany and Europe.

A disconcerting trend had been for sometime in evidence in German politics. The radical right had been found to be making its mark. Though the new Germany has so far avoided a political resurgence of the radical right, its presence remains, and that presence has influenced the political agenda. In this context, the continuing and disturbing outbreaks of extreme right violence in Germany may be noted. Of course, this kind of

position tends to mobilise opposition to the parties of the radical right, but it reminds us that the politics of the streets were linked to those of the ballot box, as during the last presidential election. As a result, the radical right in the new Germany has been relatively unsuccessful in developing a stable party presence. However, the established parties have not succeeded in eradicating it by co-opting right issues and reinterpreting and reworking them. Nor has their influence on the political agenda been undermined or definitively limited.

There is still another important aspect of the present political scene in Germany. Confronted with billion-dollar lawsuits in the United States which could cripple German industry because of its intimate complicity with the Nazis, Germany's new Chancellor Schroeder has swiftly thrown his weight behind an attempt to reach a settlement and close the book on the past.

His predecessor, Helmut Kohl refused to mediate in the row about compensation for the millions of slave labourers exploited by German firms during World War II, but Schroeder quietly got together with the biggest names in corporate Germany to hammer out a plan to set up a compensation fund for those former slave labourers who are still alive.

With Schroeder's Social Democratic Party having formed a coalition government with the Environmentalist Greens, issues of not just German interest but of world ecology, including the concern for shutting down nuclear power plants, are dramatically put under the spotlight.

The SDP and the Environmentalist Greens who have come to power introducing such new elements into the German national agenda, cannot but be effusively complimented. The whole world is optimistically looking forward to the German leadership's redeeming activities.