

Corruption in BTB

FINDINGS of the special audit on the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB), carried out by the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, only prove true the widespread suspicion that the public service establishment is a den of corruption and malpractice, reigned by officials and employees who unscrupulously trample the interest of people for personal gains.

Systemic failure has long been the perfect cover for corruption and malpractice at the BTB and its lone but highly-effective excuse for poor service. Behind the curtain has been revelry of ravenous BTB men, always suspected but never quite inquisitioned.

Now that the sordid tale of corruption and malpractice has been made public, the high-ups at the Board and, more importantly, the ministry concerned will certainly be under public scrutiny.

Care for the Environment

THE decision to fell trees at Osmany Uddyan remaining a sore-point, concerns over environmental pollution at large continue to be the least addressed among genuine public grievances.

To breathe in the clean air we need to implement the decisions to import lead-free fuel from July 1 this year and to reactivate a project designed to ensure elimination of lead from fuel refined at the Eastern Refinery Ltd.

It's worthwhile to mention that exposure to polluted air causes 15,000 premature deaths and sickness among several thousand more in Dhaka every year. This is a horrifying piece of statistics, but may not reflect the whole picture.

There is never a dearth of excuses for doing nothing, even when this exposes millions of citizens to chronic sickness, reduced productive energy, spiralling medical costs to treat symptoms, and also death.

Killings at Chittagong

THE news of the killing of two ward commissioners in Chittagong was published in the national press on Thursday. Iskander Hossain and Liakat Ali Khan were murdered within a span of thirteen hours, the former belonging to Raozan Municipality and the latter to Chittagong City Corporation.

This is very disconcerting. The broad daylight slaying of a people's representative at Chittagong and the killing of Raozan commissioner only corroborate the apprehensions that elected institutions which are cornerstones of democracy are targets of attack by armed cadres or terrorists.

The killers were alleged to have been threatening Liakat Ali Khan for some time now and actually they torched his car in front of his house a few days back. Liakat was known for his anti-terrorist stand which must have infuriated his killers.

The recent arrest of Afzal Khan in Comilla is a good beginning and we would like to see more such instances where the government deals with the situation impartially. Furthermore, given the level of local inter-feuding factional leaders should be careful and take proper safety precautions.

New Government of Bulent Ecevit in Turkey

Politics in Turkey is fascinating. A lot of pepper and salt has been added to the addition of a brand new party MHP within the precincts of the Grand National Assembly. Time will show if it will mellow by the exercise of power and come to the mainstream of Turkish politics.

FOLLOWING the general elections in Turkey recently, the outgoing Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, won the elections and has formed a new government. The government is well on the road and since it is a continuation of the immediate past government, no important change of policy is to be expected.

If policy-wise no important changes are on the cards, the election results have been surprising, to say the least. In the outgoing Parliament, the Islamist Welfare Party (RP) had the largest number of seats, in Republican Turkey founded by secularist Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, this was the first time that the Islamists scored such an important victory.

The leader of the RP Necmettin (read Nejmettin) Erbakan became Prime Minister for a while and it turned out to be a tumultuous period of Turkish politics and Erbakan. Then Erbakan saw massive desertions from his party, it fell short of the majority in his coalition and had to resign. The reins of power were taken over by Ecevit in another coalition and the elections have been held.

Once again the Turkish voters have brought about another surprise. The party of Bulent Ecevit, Democratic Left Party (DSP) with 136 members in a house of 550 members is on top.

The ultra-nationalist National Movement Party (MHP) has stunned everyone by becoming the second party with 129 members. In the last Parliament, MHP did not have a single seat since it was unable to cross the mandatory barrage of 10 per cent of votes of the entire population.

Curiously the party founded by Ataturk, Republican People's Party (CHP) has fallen into the same position and has failed to cross the barrage. The Islamist Virtue Party (FP), the successor of RP which has been banned and its leader Erbakan ousted from politics for a period of six years, came third in the latest elections with 111 seats.

In the outgoing government it was a coalition between centre left DSP and centre right ANAP. In the present government, it is a coalition between the two former partners with the addition of ultra-nationalist MHP.

Although the leader of MHP Devlet Bahceli, has been making friendly noises, their past raises questions in the minds of the Turks.

The powerful lady politician, wife of Ecevit, Rashan Ecevit has spoken out forcefully about the past of MHP, when in

lio. From the march of events it would appear that MHP is determined to live down its past and maintain a low profile. The Turkish public will watch all its moves much like it did in the case of RP of Erbakan.

The opening of the Parliament witnessed an amusing

Assembly with her head covered.

The newly elected member of parliament was not allowed to take oath. It has since been found out that she has dual nationality and has not taken the permission of the state to acquire dual nationality. Her Turkish citizenship has been cancelled. A curtain has fallen on the Kavacki episode. Covering her head with turban has been an ongoing problem in Turkey for some time. Thus we witness the spillover of this problem in the universities among girl students. The Turkish authorities consider wearing a turban a retrograde step and have been trying to face up to this delicate situation.

Trial of Abdullah Ocalan (read Ojalan), the leader of the terrorist PKK has started in Imrali island, off the coast of Istanbul. The indictment is long and he is accused of murder,



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

the late seventies they created a near-civil war, situation by butchering leftists. This led to the imposition of Martial Law in 1980. In any event, the experienced and astute Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit is expected to keep a careful watch on the entire situation and steer a careful course.

In the distribution of cabinet posts 12 ministers will come from DSP, 12 from MHP and 10 from ANAP. Minus the defence portfolio MHP has not taken any important cabinet portfolio.

episode. One elected lady MP from the Islamist FP appeared at the opening session, when oath is administered, with a turban on her head. The lady Merve Kavacki was indeed an agent provocateur. For the Grand National Assembly maintains strict protocol in all matters including dress. Dress figures prominently in Ataturk's sweeping reforms. According to that dress code nobody is to be admitted into state functions including presence within the Grand National

Thoughts on a Viable Form of Government

by Md Abul Mohsin

A national government to my mind, is the only mechanism to establish rule of law and accountability in the country without which our drift in the political wilderness is likely to continue indefinitely. A national government with proportional representation from various parties will do away with the practice of calling 'hartal' by the opposition political parties as there would be no rationale for the same!

THE national divide along political affiliation in Bangladesh is almost complete. All the professional groups, whether they be weavers, fishermen, teachers, engineers, doctors, lawyers and the like, are divided into two camps; one is patronised by the ruling party and the other by the opposition. Of course, the students remain the most politically motivated segment of the society although they are supposed to be far from party politics.

The politicians deceive the ordinary people in every possible way taking advantage of low literacy rate among the population and widespread poverty in the country. The ruling party will vigorously pursue the policies and plans adopted by it but would simply ignore even good and welfare-oriented policies of the rival party! Leaders of one political party would mention derisively the names of rival political parties. In the process, national interest and the welfare of the people are thrown to the winds.

When this is the situation in the political arena of Bangladesh, one cannot blame the people if they express loss of faith in our parliamentary system of government. Most people think that in the given circumstances of the country's political climate, parliamentary system is indeed unworkable in Bangladesh, at least for the time being.

Apparently, the situation is hopeless and to my mind, calls for drastic measures to remedy it. Needless to say that many politicians crave for power, that is to say, they dream of becoming members of the ruling party anyhow, if necessary even by defecting from the very party under the banner of which they won election in the first place! Particularly the politicians who have once been in power and enjoyed the perks of being members of the cabinet are the ones who find it difficult to reconcile with the changed status, from the cosy life under police protection to that of street agitators with the police chasing them! This makes them all the more arrogant and uncompromising with their rivals in power whatever might be the issue at stake.

It is evident that with the emergence of two major political parties in Bangladesh, with most of the parliamentary seats divided between them, politics has become polarised to such an extent that the nation itself seems divided into two camps who seem to have no national agenda except that of thwarting the other party from securing any political gain.

Under these sad and unfortunate circumstances, how can we possibly reverse the trend and bring about national unity in the political arena should be

the major point of consideration of our political thinkers. Some of the measures that I can think of to remedy the situation would call for widespread changes in the political system obtaining in the country.

In order to put a stop to clamouring for change of government soon after a general election, it is necessary to increase the stake in the existence of the government by widening its base. How to do it?

Induction of ministers from various parties: If the government can be made a representative one with MPs from various parties under an agreed formula, this can be achieved. If constitutional provision is made for inducting one minister in the cabinet from each political party for every 10 MPs it has in the parliament, we will have some 30 ministers/state ministers in the cabinet from two/three political parties. The present number of ministers/state ministers is not much less than 30 mentioned here. This will not only ensure a broad-based government reflecting different shades of opinion in the country, but will also pacify the opposition parties by giving them an effective say in the administration of the country. As such they will surely not like to bring down the government of which they would be an integral part themselves! Obviously some safety measures will have to be introduced in the constitution to ensure stability of the government.

How the proposed system will work needs some clarification. The President of the country will have to play a pivotal role in the system for which adequate constitutional provisions have to be made.

Proposed System: After the general election, the party securing the single majority in the parliament will choose the Prime Minister and all the parties will nominate one member for the cabinet for every 10 MPs belonging to them. In case there are parties with 9 MPs instead of the required 10, they may be allocated, post of Minister/State Minister considering the exigencies of the situation. The majority party shall have the option of nominating, apart from the PM, the ministers for Finance, Defence, Establishment and Cabinet Affairs and Foreign Affairs. It shall be mandatory on the part of the majority party to accept the nominations of the other parties for inclusion in the cabinet and the President shall be responsible to see to it that it is implemented properly. The President shall be within his powers to refuse to administer oaths of office to the ministers if he is not satisfied with the allocation of portfolios among the political parties having the required number of MPs in the National Assembly. If any dispute arises in this regard, the decision of the President shall be final and the courts shall have no jurisdiction in the matter.

Functioning of Cabinet: The cabinet will take decisions on the basis of consensus on issues, simple majority should suffice in cases of any deadlock. Since such a government will in effect be a national government, every member of the cabinet shall be entitled to vote according to his/her conscience. In other words, there will be no party agenda as such but a national agenda for the betterment of the economy of the country and the quality of life of the masses. If any Minister resigns from the cabinet, another MP from the party concerned will replace him/her. No cabinet decision shall be valid unless endorsed by the President. All cabinet decisions must be submitted to him for approval/endorsement before they come into force.

No decision of permanent nature on any issue shall be taken by the cabinet unless there is consensus on it. However, temporary or stop gap decisions may be taken by the cabinet on the basis of simple majority for the sake of smooth running of the administration.

Working of Parliament: In the parliament, the MPs shall vote on the issues under discussion according to their conscience. All bills must have votes of at least two-thirds of the MPs present to become law. However, the budget being an annual feature, may be passed with a simple majority so that government functions do not come to a grinding halt if there is a deadlock on various items of the budget.

The suggestions made in the foregoing paragraphs entail a good deal of changes in the parliamentary system prevalent in the country. But considering the chaotic situation in the law and order sector and the deteriorating economy of the country, it would be imperative to approach the various problems facing the country from a national point of view, so that rule of law can be enforced in all sectors of national life and the culprits do not get any blessings from any quarter.

Of course, it goes without saying that any change in the existing system would have to be accepted by the political parties themselves. It may be pointed out here that in the proposed system, the politicians have nothing to lose but a lot to gain. At least the parties gaining seats in the parliament would have a definite stake in the government and its decisions. They will not feel deprived from the process of decision making by the majority party on the strength of a few more seats in the parliament which at times can be as little as a majority of one vote only!

A national government to my mind, is the only mechanism to establish rule of law and accountability in the country without which our drift in the political wilderness is likely to continue indefinitely. A national government with proportional representation from various parties will do away with the practice of calling 'hartal' by the opposition political parties as there would be no rationale for the same!

Our politicians always proclaim that they are ready to shed the last drop of their blood for the sake of the country. I do not think that the people are at all interested in seeing them bleed to death! On the other hand, they would be eternally grateful to the political leaders if they sincerely abide by the rules and regulations prevalent in the country while recruiting government employees, awarding government contracts, executing development projects and also maintaining transparency in their actions as government functionaries.

The political leaders must take the lead in re-establishing the culture of rule of law in the country, otherwise, it would be of no avail no matter how stringent laws are passed. People cannot be fooled by double-talking politicians all the time!

Change in the Electoral System: It may not be out of place to say that a change in the electoral system bring about some positive good in the national life. In the corridors of one could find the candidates for various constituencies, the party would contest the election on the basis of the party symbol and its manifesto. The voters would

then cast votes for the symbol and not for any particular candidate. After the election results are out, the party would be able to nominate qualified and competent persons to the seats won by it. In this way, the influence of muscle power and black money in elections would be reduced to a great extent. Further, it would also enable a party to conduct highly confident experts in various fields in the parliament who normally shy away from the hassle of electioneering.

No-confidence Motion: It may also be mentioned in passing that the practice of bringing a no-confidence motion against a sitting government does no good to the people at large. During the no-confidence motion, MPs of the opposition parties vote against the ruling party which may result in the ouster of the government from power hastening a general election. However, the ensuing election also may not bring about any meaningful change in the relative strength of the political parties in the parliament as has been shown in the three Indian elections during the last three years. This happens because the electorate does not vote with the same purpose as the MPs do during the no-confidence vote.

During a general election people vote in their respective areas to choose a particular person of their liking whatever might be the point/points of consideration. They do not say 'let us elect more MPs from party X' so that it gets a comfortable majority in the parliament to form a viable government and the nation does not have to face elections frequently.

On the other hand, when the no-confidence motion is being debated in the parliament, the incumbent party, just to avoid being thrown out of power, would make all kinds of concessions to the opposition MPs — offer cabinet posts, huge sums as bribe, immunity from cases and so on! No doubt these under-hand dealings bring disrepute to democracy making a mockery of it. Obviously it serves no useful purpose and should be done away with. It only satisfies the political grudge of one party against the other and the people are forced to pay for it. Moreover, in a national government where all major parties are represented, there would be no use for this practice. The government should be allowed to remain in

torture and all kinds of terrorist activities. He gave leadership to the war in the South East Turkey, which in an 11-year period has taken 31000 lives. He was captured under dramatic circumstances in Africa and has been brought for trial. He is produced in the court in a glass cage much like Adolf Eichman of Germany during his trial in Israel.

Ocalan has asked for forgiveness and promised to work for the Turkish state and bring to an end the fratricidal war between Turks and the Kurds. Death penalty exists in Turkish statute books although nobody has been handed down a death penalty in last 15 years. Families of soldiers who have fallen in this murderous war are clamouring for a death sentence. In any case when Ocalan was captured the war in Southeast Turkey had lost a lot of its intensity.

Politics in Turkey is fascinating. A lot of pepper and salt has been added to the addition of a brand new party MHP within the precincts of the Grand National Assembly. Time will show if it will mellow by the exercise of power and come to the mainstream of Turkish politics. The armed forces, the guardian of the reforms of Ataturk and especially his secular reforms, are expected to exercise vigilance.

National government: Very often, we come across writings in which political columnists and academicians plead for national consensus on major policy issues by the political parties. But the point is, unless there is a formal structure in the political system to bring the diverse views together and hammer out a consensus on various national issues, the desired result cannot be achieved. It seems that a national government with proportional representation of political parties on the basis of the results of general election would be the best guarantee for achieving the national consensus.

Therefore, the ground work for the required changes in the constitution should be initiated by the ruling party and the opposition parties together so that the country can move towards a national government soon before the acrimonious behaviour of the political parties take them to a point of no return. Moreover, in order to take pragmatic and implementable decisions on vital issues like privatisation of state enterprises, free trade, labour policy, education policy, foreign investment etc, it is essential that the decision are taken in a forum where all major political parties are represented. And the national government seems to be the need of the hour. In a parliamentary system of government, the decisions taken by the ruling party may be annulled or modified by the next government for political expediency because sometimes political survivability of the ruling party becomes more important than national interest!

We have to overcome our fascination for the Westminster type of parliamentary system. It may be suitable for a highly educated and tolerant society like that of Great Britain even though many of its provisions are based on traditions rather than written words. Even in highly educated Asian countries like Japan, Korea and Taiwan we find the parliamentarians coming to blows on disputed issues while the parliament is in session! Much worse things have happened in our parliament in the past which are quite fresh in our memory and there is no indication that these would not happen again!

It therefore appears that in order to bring about a reconciliation in the political life of the country and in the national life as a whole, some changes in the existing political system are unavoidable.

The writer is a retired Additional Secretary to the Government.

To the Editor...

Poetic justice

Sir, Bangladesh's comprehensive victory over Pakistan in the World Cup cricket match was a supreme example of poetic justice.

For long 25 years while this region was a part of Pakistan, not a single Bengali cricketer was considered good enough for the Pakistan Test team. The insufferable arrogance and narrow-mindedness of the Pakistan ruling junta, civil or military, have been proved many times in the years following 1947, and also their calculated attempts to create a divide at every level and layer of society. This justifies our dissociation from them in 1971.

Perhaps this very convincing defeat will prove to Pakistanis and to the world at large that Pakistan had indeed been unjust to the Bengalis in more ways than one.

It also gives to the cricketing world a clear notice: we are no pushovers. Don't trifle with Bangladesh. We have unexpected resources and undreamed of capacities.

My most fervent salute to the 11 Royal Bengal Tigers. Thank you. You have made us all stand ten feet tall.

Ziaur Rahman Khan, Barrister-at-Law, 500A, Dhanmondi R.A., Road No 7, Dhaka

Our happiest hour

Sir, On behalf of the Bangladeshi residents in Saint Petersburg, Florida, I am sending this note of congratulations to express our heartfelt joy and happiness on the victory of Bangladesh team over Pakistan team. We watched the live telecast of the game here in Florida, far...far...away from homeland but love for the country is forever. Yes, we couldn't miss it and had to get out of our busy hectic schedule to watch the game and to share its essence with our countrymen.

Congratulations once again to all the tigers of Bangladesh team. The happiest moment of my life was the liberation of Bangladesh and to add more glory to it is the glorious victory of Bangladesh team over Pakistan team in the World Cup 1999.

Salim Ullah Khan and Family, 4703 22nd Ave South (Khan's Market)

Rabbit vs Turtle

Sir, The match between Bangladesh and Pakistan seems to be a match between a rabbit and a turtle. The rabbit was the Pakistan team and the turtle was the Bangladesh team. Pakistan thought that they would win the match effortlessly against Bangladesh. So they were sleeping just like a rabbit. And Bangladesh team just like a turtle reached their destination while walking.

When Pakistan team woke up they saw that Bangladesh team reached their destination before them.

The rabbit and turtle race was just like this match. The rabbit thought by giving two or three huge leaps he would reach the destination long before the turtle. So the rabbit went for a nap, but the turtle kept on creeping towards the destination. When the rabbit woke up he saw that the turtle almost reached the destination, then he tried very hard but failed.

I found this cricket match very similar to the rabbit and turtle race. Pakistan is one of the hot favourite team in the World Cup. They are very strong and also a Test playing nation. Therefore Bangladesh's victory over Pakistan side was an unbelievable sight to see. It was very enjoyable and proud moment for us. I hope and pray that Bangladesh team earn more success for the nation in the future.

Sheela Haider, Dhaka

Save the trees

Sir, Couple of days back, I visited one of my relations in

Bardem. The cabin was situated in the 13th floor and from the end of the corridors one could have an overview of the city. The green belt of trees of Ramna Green and Suhrawardy Uddyan was eye soothing. But on looking further out one could also see the concrete jungle of the great metropolis. What a contrast it was!

It filled me with sadness when I thought that another such green belt of Osmani Uddyan is going to be obliterated to expose the ugliness of this city.

The residential plots in Dhanmandi, Banani, Gulshan and in all other areas of Dhaka used to have many trees. In fact many house owners used to take pride in systematic planting of trees in vacant land. Birds eye view of Dhaka from an aeroplane was, predominantly, trees and buildings partly hidden by trees.

But in last 10 years or so, the situation has changed dramatically. To make room for multi-storied buildings where every inch of land is precious, all trees in the residential areas under development were cut down. In this way the city has already lost innumerable trees. Now a few trees are visible in between the huge buildings. The roof gardens and a few pot plants on the balconies are hardly the substitute.

rapidly declining in the city, every vacant public land should be planted with trees and should be served against encroachment and so-called prestigious schemes like building Convention Centre.

It gives me a great satisfaction that the civil society and the people from all walks of life have joined hands to save Osmani Uddyan.

Sakhawat Hossain, Gulshan, Dhaka

Substitute ways

Sir, Hartal, road and rail blockade and non-cooperation movement are not the only methods to express one's resentment and protest against the government. Sometimes it turns out to be violent. There are other ways to express it too. And BNP showed it through mass hunger strike, processions, long march and road march.

I ask our opposition politicians instead of keeping the people hostage and halting or stopping all the activities every now and then, thereby plunging the country into a standstill; from now on they should go to all the parts of the country and tell the people about the wrong doings and failures of the government in peaceful ways

through mass hunger strikes, long march and road march. On one hand it will give them an opportunity to go nearer to the people and on the other, they will know what the problems and difficulties the people are facing and what they (the people) want and expect from the politicians.

Iqbal Ahmed, New Eskaton Road, Dhaka

Attention ATN

Sir, The ATN Bangla channel is very popular among Bangladeshis viewers. This channel is promoting Bangalee culture through its various programmes. But it is a matter of deep regret that the ATN Bangla is the only satellite TV channel which through its vulgar advertisements is promoting cigarette smoking. One would notice that the statutory warning, i.e. "Smoking is injurious to health" which follows the advertisements is often flashed on the screen just for a second.

Would the ATN authority please stop promoting smoking in the greater interest of human health?

M Zahidul Haque, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207