

President's Call Resonates

PRESIDENT Shahabuddin Ahmed has once again hit the nail on the head, this time perhaps more forcefully than before with the new millennium zooming in on us. While addressing a seminar organised on Saturday by the Society for International Development on the topic "Bangladesh in the 21st Century: Socio-Economic Perspectives", the President made out a strong case for national consensus wondering why the political leaders should allow their professional rivalry to degenerate into personal animus.

His apprehension seems to be that we shall be thrown by the wayside as the new millennium approaches us should the two major players on our political scene fail to seek cooperation in place of confrontation and exchange of accusations that have become a trade-mark of their thoroughly embittered relationship. In working democracies around the world, a degree of bipartisan understanding is forged and carefully retained on some vital issues of national interest, regardless of any lean patch the major political parties undergo from time to time. This stands in good stead not just for the sitting government but also for the opposition who might form government at a future date. It is an investment in the present and future.

The President fully echoes our sentiments when he urges the key players in country's politics to take a unified stance to abjure the use of students and workers for political purposes. This, together with a 'no' to muscle-power, will bring about unanimity at the national political platform and restore peace to the campus and work-places clearing the deck for all-round national development.

We think the President's wise words of counsel especially need to be heeded at this juncture when the national politics is at its confrontational worst threatening to engulf life in a deluge of anarchy.

PM's Work Schedule

WITH five ministries and divisions, and five more departments under her direct supervision, bureaucratic drudgery surely consumes a substantial segment of the prime minister's daily life. The present arrangement requires her approval for even the overseas trips of government officials down to the rank of an additional secretary. It certainly leaves her pressed for time to discharge her responsibilities in matters related to policy-planning and implementation. By recommending a restructuring of the prime minister's work schedule, the Public Administration Reforms Commission (PARC) has indeed drawn attention to an issue that touches on the concern for effective governance.

True, the ministries of defence, establishment, power, energy and mineral resources; the cabinet division and the prime minister's office; bureaus of anti-corruption and NGO affairs, the Board of Investment, EPZ authorities and the National Security Intelligence — are all important state establishments needing the PM's constant attention. However, there appear to be some routine work that she does now which could easily be delegated to the ministers, secretaries and designated chiefs concerned. The Rules of Business demands the prime minister's attention to issues related to different ministries as the head of the government. Besides, as the chancellor of several universities and the chief executive of the state, she has to make important decisions on policy matters. Therefore, relieving her of relatively inconsequential routine bureaucratic matters would certainly give her the much-needed space and time to apply herself more on policy and governance issues.

An ideal democratic set-up calls for delegation of authorities and the PARC recommendation has stressed that point most convincingly. In line with the World Bank's *An Outline of Efficient Government*, the commission favours a selective flow of issues into the PMO to enhance the government's efficiency and activism. The PARC recommendation should be accepted without ado.

Treatment to Sharif

PAKISTAN'S deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has complained of 'horrific' living conditions at the Malir prison in southern Karachi where he has been kept by the regime that overthrew him on October 12. The former head of government has demanded better treatment from the authorities. His lawyers have reportedly decided to argue in the court that he was not receiving the level of treatment guaranteed under prison rules of Pakistan."

After all, the accusations against Sharif still remain to be proven. Nawaz Sharif has many more court appearances to make before a verdict is reached on the charges of treason and hijacking being levelled against him. He is a suspect until proven guilty and is entitled to treatment as admissible under the prison code of Pakistan, no more, no less. Besides, there is a question of civility, propriety, and respect for law involved in regard to a deposed prime minister undergoing a legal scrutiny. He was voted into power by the Pakistani electorate and in deference to his status deserves a better treatment than he is allegedly receiving now. The regime may deem it fit to issue a clarification to remove any misgiving on this count.

Russia's Spectres of Disintegration

Several dozens of corporate-oligarchic semi-states have been created in the country as a result of spontaneous decentralisation trends which have grown since the end of 1997. This is especially true of the regions with extreme climatic-physical conditions — mountains, deserts, tundras etc. Some of the people living in such regions know nothing about the country whose citizens they are politically.

giant — still the world's largest country covering as many as eleven time zones.

The Soviet disintegration had reduced the vastness of Russia — the USSR's core republic and its successor state. The Russian Federation still comprised 21 republics, six territories, 49 regions, two Federal-status cities, one autonomous region and 10 autonomous areas. In other words, it has even now 89 unwieldy asymmetrical entities incorporated in it. In has in a bewildering variety of nations and nationalities stitched together. Its physical geography stretches over equally diverse landscapes — mountains, deserts, steppes, tundras and so on. However, the edifice has at long last been crumbling — silently but inexorably.

The declaration of Russia's sovereignty in 1990 almost at once set in motion the process also of the disintegration of Russia itself with an overwhelming majority of Russia's national autonomous republics proclaiming their sovereignty by the end of the year. The conditions for further disintegration of Russia were created by the new Constitution of Russia framed in 1993. The article 5 of the first chapter of the constitution's first section stipulates that a republic is entitled to have its own constitution and legislation. It further states that 'a territory, a region, a federal-status city, an autonomous region and an autonomous area are entitled to their own statute and legislation'. The Constitution has also granted the treaty-based relations between the federation and 'sovereign' republics.

As a result of such liberal constitutional provisions Russia still remained a lumbering

sia's 'sovereign' republics immediately and openly announced their secession or the right to secession. This was most firmly codified by the constitutions of the republics like Tyva, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Other constituent members of the federation like Daghestan, Komi and Ingushetia proclaimed themselves the sovereign participants in foreign policy and external economic relations. According to the constitution of Yakutia and Northern Ossetia their presidents adopt decisions on the stationing and movement of military units in their respective territories. The republics

the federation enjoy all kinds of benefits and privileges just by virtue of the treaties on delineation of the terms of reference and powers between federal and regional authorities. Such partisan treatments of some of the constituent members dislodge the federation off its moral high ground and weakens the central authority.

Also otherwise the management of the federation comprising 89 members is rather difficult. This difficulty is also due to the obsolete principle of administrative-territorial division of the country — particularly its inaccessible regions. The principle was first used in

Siberia in eighteenth century. At that time the areas ruled by the governors were logically created along the length of the Yenisei and Lena rivers. However, the latitudinal Trans-Siberian Railway and Baikal-Amur Main Line as well as northern sea-route have since become the main transport avenues of Russia's north-Siberia while the resource producing territories are subordinated to the regional capitals situated far to the south from them. North Siberia is yet to be developed whereas South Siberia has already passed through several stages of development. This distortion in development is certainly disincentive to international efforts, if any.

Russia's spaciousness is of

PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

Tyva even codified its right to declare war, introduce Martial Law and adopt its own law on military service. Some of the republics also introduced the procedure for the declaration of the state of emergency in their respective areas.

The advantages of the reforms and extent of power to be enjoyed by the states are also unequally divided between the federation members making the federation vulnerable to pulls and pressures by the constituent members. Such inequality was created through power delineation treaties during the presidential election campaign in 1996 presumably to bargain votes in exchange of favour to be dispensed with. As a result, some of the members of

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Strangely, the country's federal structure has been a power-

ful factor of Russia's political disintegration since 1996. Before that federation members were governed by the governors who were president's appointees. These governors were accountable to the president. The governors began to be elected from 1996. So, in reality the regions are now governed by the stooges of local criminals, groups, clans and elites pursuing their local interests. To make things worse, a chain reaction of more centrifugal tendencies began in 1998. One region after another announced the discontinuation of tax payments to the federal budget. Even the all-powerful president of the federation could not dismiss the defying governors.

Several dozens of corporate-oligarchic semi-states have been created in the country as a result of spontaneous decentralisation trends which have grown since the end of 1997. This is especially true of the regions with extreme climatic-physical conditions — mountains, deserts, tundras etc. Some of the people living in such regions know nothing about the country whose citizens they are politically. The country's regional enclaves independently regulate the movements of goods through their respective territories and subjugate to themselves the local officials of federal structures.

It happened more than once in the history of Russia that it either split into several parts or was exposed to such a threat. Its latest disintegration began after February 1997 revolution with different kinds of new entities springing up within its borders. Surprisingly, each time Russia found forces for self-restoration as an integral state. What is more, it came out of each period of disintegration more united and stronger than before. But can she do it this time when the forces of the history are against it?

Making the Federation Effective

In creating more provinces and doing away with quotas we not only ensure parity but enter the new millennium as genuine and equal partners of a Federation made much more effective and viable. To quote Gen Burki "we need unity through the will of the people, where people feel secure and do not nurture fears of domination of one race by the other".

Materially, serious imbalances exist in the relative levels of development in the different Provinces. Urban growth is much more pronounced than urban development, leaving agriculture, the backbone of the economy, relatively neglected. When one unit was broken up in 1968 by Gen Yahya Khan, it was too little too late, the four Provinces were still too large either population-wise or area-wise to administer, decisions even on the smallest proposals, or problems of the rural areas were referred through the Provincial capitals to Islamabad. Seldom forthcoming quickly if ever, the time-lag in decision-making was disastrous.

A successful growth of a Federal State envisages meaningful participation from all the people in political, economic and administrative affairs of the nation. In countries which have disparate social, linguistic and local affinities, a Federal structure is the only viable political system. The danger here is that if the people's rights are denied, the political process is compromised resulting in parochial and regional schisms. The erosion of the power of the Provinces has led to deprivation and alienation of the smaller constituent units. Both for material and psychological reasons, we have serious disharmony, centered mostly in Sindh and Balochistan. Unscrupulous local politicians having no hope of national recognition have further exacerbated the prevailing tensions for their own petty individual interests. From time to time good leaders have emerged, only to become prisoners of the system, resulting in the deterioration of the quality of life of the average Pakistani.

Over-centralisation deepened the already existing feeling of deprivation in the smaller Provinces and outlying districts and the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of administration down the line became more and more manifest. At present Punjab, with 60 per cent of the population, is accused of domination by the smaller Provinces. The previous regime rarely reached out to anybody without a Model Town and Kashmiri pedigree, then one of Lahore, the perception in the other Provinces was of largely Punjabi domination. Punjab became the target of mass animosity, though for the most part the Punjabi masses suffered the same deprivation and discrimination as anyone else in the Federation. For the Federation to survive, this feeling of disenchantment must be replaced with the warmth and affection that first bound Pakistan together as a unique experiment in nationhood for the first 20 years of the existence

despite many aberrations. Maj Gen (Rtd) Masood Burki's book "Blueprint for Visible and Stable Pakistan" makes very cogent arguments based on a comprehensive study of case-studies such as Switzerland, Belgium, India and Nigeria, populated like Pakistan by diverse people having different languages and cultures. Switzerland has German, French, Italian and Romanch as languages and culture. Like the Punjab (60%) in Pakistan, Switzerland is dominated by the Germans (70%) but the country is divided into 26 cantons. Similarly Belgium has two distinct centres, French

a civil war (Biafra) earlier (in 1966) than Pakistan (in 1971), went from three regions to seven States to 19 States before a semblance of unity and cohesion could be achieved. Punjab has become unwieldy with too much administrative power concentrated in Lahore, development being largely in the urban areas at the cost of the rural areas. With population more than the other three provinces combined, Punjab has created a psychological mindblock among them, the other smaller provinces little realising that the outlying districts of Punjab are perhaps worse affected. In Balochistan

Moreover he has asked for all the Provinces to be Federal-administered territories. He has got a reasonable balance between population and area size, recommending that the Federal Government exercise control over, viz (1) Defence, (2) Foreign Affairs, (3) Currency and Fiscal Policies, (4) Trade and Commerce, only policy, (5) Federal Taxation, (6) Railways, (7) Federal Highways and Motorways, (8) Water and Power, (9) Education, only basic policy, and (10) TV, Radio and Telecommunications. The Provinces would have viz (1) Agriculture, (2) Irrigation, (3) Power Generation and Distribution, (4) Trade and Commerce, (5) Provincial Taxation, (6) Local Government and Provincial Highways. He missed out Home Affairs (or Interior) and Aviation but that should be concurrent subject.

Instead of bureaucracies and appointed judges there is a dire need to have elected figures in administration and justice, keeping in mind that some of the smaller units may require stop-gap arrangements till their own cadres come up to scratch. In partial modification of Gen Burki's proposals and on the premise that there will be no right of secession, the National Assembly (NA) taking over any Provincial Govt if the NA feels sovereignty is endangered, there is need to increase the number of Provinces. Punjab should have five Provinces centred around Rawalpindi, Lahore, Sargodha, Gujrat and Rahimyar Khan. Sindh should have two provinces centred around Karachi (less the Port and adjacent areas) and Hyderabad (Keti Bundi must be with Hyderabad). Similarly NWFP should have two provinces cen-

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

Speaking Walloons (44%) and Dutch speaking Flemish (55%) but it has nine provinces inclusive of both the languages and cultures in each province. At the time of independence in 1947, India had seven provinces and a few Union-administered territories despite 24 distinct languages. For better administration and to ease ethnic diversity, 15 more provinces have been created and the Union territories increased to nine. Even now India needs to increase the number of Provinces as the dozen or so secessionist problems (Nagaland, Mizoram, Assam, Bodoland, Manipur, etc) are far from being solved. Kashmir being a different matter altogether.

Nigeria, which went through

there is polarization between Baloch and Pakhtoos with the people of the Mekran Coast a separate entity altogether. In Sindh, the divide is more between ethnic Sindhis and Mohajirs, though in Karachi many more nationalities exist. In NWFP there is a divide between the (1) Peshawar valley extending upto Attock and (2) Hazara Division, the DI Khan area becoming completely apart. Development is more diverse in Punjab than in Sindh, where it is in Karachi and Hyderabad mostly, in Balochistan only in Quetta and in NWFP only in Peshawar. Gen Burki has recommended 17 provinces but has included Azad Kashmir but one feels this should be kept as a separate entity.

Like many, share croppers are not getting their reasonable share due to lack of proper application of sharecropper law.

Many such problems have been discussed in the article. So, I would like to request the Land Ministry to take immediate initiative for implementing their mentioned suggestion.

Sir, The knee-jerk action of the authority in snatching away former president Ershad's passport at the airport before a foreign trip may be either due to sudden emergency or it is a tactical act. Why this passenger was not informed earlier that he could not leave the country? This is not the way to treat a former president and an MP.

AZ Dhaka

knows that Manju's maneuvering of the situation at that time changed the course of history. Practically speaking, JP is sitting right in the middle of AL and BNP. Could it be that a combined JP is on the 'vital centre'? If so it explains why BNP is so scared of coming close to JP. JP might appear to be a viable alternative to BNP to the public if they are in close proximity.

Md Masudun Nabi House #17, Road #99 Gulshan, Dhaka

Ershad at ZIA

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Land administration

Sir, Thanks to Mr Abdul Kader and Mr Sohel Ibn Ali for writing an appropriate article on our present land administration and management system, published on October 27, 1999 in *The Daily Star*. They have tried to find out the actual problems.

Although Bangladesh is an agrarian country and 80 per cent of its total population are dependent on this sector, the people are not aware about land-laws. So, day after day,

this vast majority of our country are suffering due to land administration complexities.

In the scope of that complexity, a large amount of government owned khas land, khas water bodies etc. are illegally occupied by the so-called powerful persons of the society. Allegedly, a good number of corrupt government officers are also involved in it.

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Md Rakibur Hasan Pisciculture Housing Society Shyamoli, Dhaka

Phone cards for MPs

Sir, We have bank loan defaulters, and we have MPs who are defaulters in the payment of arrears and current telephone bills to the tune of crore of taka (in spite of payment of telephone allowance as per?).

There might be one solution: fit desktop card telephones at their official addresses, and give them telephone cards for one year up to the limit prescribed. After that they procure new cards privately and make telephone calls to their heart's content, reaching the heart of their constituents. There is a proverb: one who pays cash gets the best.

A Husnain Dhaka