

The new Mayor must install a real city government

Performance matters most to the citizens

THE City Corporation polls are now over without any major incidence of violence as feared and a low voters turnout at least in Dhaka, as expected. The army and other forces were deployed as promised but violence was as absent as the voters in politics mad Dhaka where the most prestigious seat was up for election. We now have a new Mayor in Sadek Hossain Khoka and one hopes that all the promises made by him including expanding the scope of city government will now come into being.

Meanwhile the leading opposition party the Awami League has stated that it rejects the elections and also cited the low turnout as an indication of the public mood. Awami League however will not be able to sell this argument as it didn't participate in the polls at all and has little legitimacy to make such comments. Their involvement in the city polls would have showed that the party was concerned about the voters' welfare as well as politics since city elections are not as much about city political clout as it is about providing urban support services to its citizens. In this phase of heightened environment of politics above people, Awami League chose politics and thereby excluded themselves from the debate.

Critical to the notion of governance of course will be the idea of city government. There has been much resistance to this idea because it seems Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh is unduly concentrated with people, power and politics. But Dhaka as just an adjunct part of the country will be impossible to govern. As the issues surrounding Dhaka city has shown, it has got individual problems that need special attention, be it in the management of the solid and liquid waste or eradication of mosquito and waterlogging. The city's law and order situation and traffic management are all part of the demanding menu which Sadek Hossain Khoka will have to take care of.

But it's eminently possible and Sadek Hossain Khoka can get much of it done. He can begin by installing a process of transparency in the way the City Corporation's tendering scene is handled and proceed to establish a direct communication system with the residents. The new Mayor, by ensuring a city government in real sense of the term can make life memorable for himself as a political administrator and for the people he has declared to serve.

One may well forget the quality of this election but they aren't likely to forget a bad performance and on that account the new Mayor will not have much competition with the immediate past one. There are too many foul odours -- apart from Dhaka's regular ones -- which follow him. That way Khoka has a relatively easier job but there is no doubt that this is the most important political job he has ever held.

We wish him and other elected mayors the best.

Submarine cable consortium a great news

Bangladesh must start thinking IT

BANGLADESH has finally been invited to the submarine cable consortium which for all members of the e-world is one of the best news possible. The first meeting to be held in Cairo will certainly repair a major flaw in the web combine that is necessary for moving forward on the information highway.

Media reports suggest that by being an early bird Bangladesh can access many facilities and the cost for Bangladesh will not be more than 60 million dollars, a pittance compared to the revenue and facilities that will be generated. This will come into operation not later than March 2004.

Growth in Bangladesh has been hampered considerably by lack of access to submarine cables and in fact this was partly because the need and demand for the web world was underestimated. This has resulted in extremely slow development of the IT initiatives and Bangladesh has certainly lost out in the first round process. It can't afford to do this again.

Experts and futurists have all said that Bangladesh needs the IT world for survival because smokestack industries have collapsed and sweatshops are also on their way out. This means that for a labour surplus country the only way out is to gain skills as this surplus labour is essentially unskilled and with a diminishing demand in the world. To avoid being a left out standing marooned in the global future we need connectivity. The submarine consortium is a welcome opportunity which we must avail ourselves of now to achieve that.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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Thanks a lot to the Finance Minister

In Bangladesh rarely we get a chance to thank our government for its success in any field. We have come to know, through the news item 'Next budget to have deficit cut measures' (April 18) that the government has succeeded in increasing the inflow of remittances over 33 per cent in the first three quarters of the current fiscal year compared to the same period of the last fiscal.

I don't want to miss this rare opportunity to thank our FM for his taking tough and efficacious measures to achieve this amazing success. No success is out of our reach, if we Bangladeshis are dedicated to our national interests.

Faruque Hasan
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

MIGs and helicopters

In reply to Mr Samee's letter (April 24), All I have to say is with Non Resident Bengali's (NRB's) like our friend here, thank god the government never figured out how to enfranchise them.

In regards to MW's letter, I am sorry if I appeared to be doing an about face. My arguments in favour of ground based air defence as opposed to MIGs were in respect for those people who think we should maintain the armed forces. I was trying to show that even if I were to accept that such a defensive posture is necessary, which I don't, MIGs were the wrong mix for us. I think we have established that there are far better ways to defend ourselves, which are more commensurate to our financial strength and strategic requirements.

Now in regards to our country's defence, I am sure MW agrees with me that the BDR and Coast Guard should be strengthened. I have never asked for the abolishment of these two institutions that I do feel are necessary for maintaining the territorial integrity of our country as well as to counter smugglers and protect fishing rights. The BDR is under armed and ill equipped and the same for the coast guard. Of the few G-3 and AK-47 assault rifles we have, who do you think needs them more? The BDR who exchange fire with the Burmese and the BSF or the Army Commandos in their barracks and the para ground?

Imagine how many fast patrol boats armed only with .50 calibre machine guns we could buy instead of that Kim-ki frigate which doesn't work. As a matter of fact and correct me if I am wrong, the Naval shipyard

has the ability to assemble all the patrol boats we would need to protect our maritime rights.

The above are examples of what I would call misplaced priorities. Why do you believe that we absolutely require a standing army, navy and air force? Why not an alternative like National Service? Why do we accept silently the armed forces involvement in banking and hotel management? If we accept this we'll end up like Indonesia. This is regression not progress.

In regards to India, I really honestly do not think we have to fear a full-scale invasion from them. At most we have border skirmishes; India has more than enough on its plate to want to invade Bangladesh.

And as for Burma, whom I don't trust, a re-enforced BDR should be able to deal with them. I should mention that statistically and

historically, a democracy is far less likely to go to war than a country run by a military junta. But even then Burma has enough trouble dealing with the Karen's and their own democracy movement (whom we should support) to want to seriously bother us.

So I would stand by my argument for abolishing the army, navy and air force. While maintaining a strengthened BDR (with an air wing) and the Coast Guard. The military only preserves democracy when the civilian government controls it. Not necessarily the case with us.

Biggles

Dhaka

Telephone system
It seems, at long last the BTTB has started thinking positively.

The first item appears to me the

recent leaflet on the reduction of international and domestic tariff. There are two aspects of this ray of light seen through a small window of BTTB. Firstly reduction of tariff itself (though not enough) secondly the method of transmitting this information to the subscribers.

It seems to be a revolutionary conception for the BTTB to issue leaflets and attaching them with their bills. Good we welcome these steps which are towards the right direction. If the BTTB has to compete with Internet and mobile phones they have to turn their organisation in to a user-friendly one.

As far as the international tariff is concerned the rate should be halved and charged per half a minute units instead one minutes' unit. This way the subscribers will not be subjected to pay for a full minute for a few

seconds of last minute conversation, BTTB will get money for the actual duration of conversation.

As BTTB cannot or do not provide ISD access to all the subscribers, the minimum charge of 3 minutes for operator assisted calls, they should abolish the minimum 3 minutes charge and the 2 minutes of PP charge. If and when the BTTB are in a position to providing all their digital subscribers with ISD access, the three minute minimum charge may be introduced for operator assisted calls, as in other countries.

Central Enquiry service for tariff rules and directory service should be modernised and re-introduced. '17' and '18' have ceased to function a long ago. What is really required is a real modern telephone service.

Adisgruntled subscriber
Dhaka

to heed President Bush's instructions gives some lessons to the US Administration in the formulation of subsequent policies towards Israel and the region as a whole. It is widely believed that Administration's pro-Israeli policies are damaging its wider political and strategic interests in the region and particularly its war against terrorism. More and more countries are going against the US. The US citizens are at risk in those places. Already the US appears to have problems even with many of its European allies on the issue of dealing with terrorism as Israeli military actions have seriously clouded the US's vision of "fight against terrorism".

Let President Bush decide whether he should continue to support Israel and give enormous aid (Sr. Bush as president reportedly halted some aid to Israel at one stage because of Israel's non compliance of US wishes on M-E conflict) that sustains Israel and its ferocious army -- indeed the superpower in the region -- that commits state terrorism against the people of Palestine. Sharon's terrorism in Jenin dwarfed all the suicide bombings put together.

Indeed, it appears that President Bush has at long last taken a plunge into the region's malignant problems. He should indeed go for fixing Sharon who has openly defied the US president. Let President Bush give some serious thought to his overall policy parameters in the region. If full peace is achieved and all Arab countries go for normalization of relations with Israel, then the violence by Hamas and other radicals would die down. This would indeed be the best way to fight terrorism.

September 11 terrorists' attack has divided the world irrevocably. And more so because of the Bush doctrine -- either you are with us or with the terrorists -- which has brought the issue of terrorism into intense world focus. Therefore, it has become absolutely necessary to have a clear definition of terrorism under the auspices of the UN General Assembly where all the countries of the world are represented. The definition can not be given by the UNSC as it is infected with veto.

The most powerful man on earth

today looks somewhat weaker as his words or even clear instructions to

Israel to "withdraw immediately" and "now" for valid reasons from recently

occupied areas of Palestinian territories were openly defied by Sharon. It was unprecedented and obviously

President Bush did not like this. He

dispatched his Secretary of State Colin Powell to the region. Powell

spent days in consulting the neighboring Arab leaders, which allowed

enough time to Sharon to withdraw from the recently occupied areas. But unfortunately Sharon as usual did not budge an inch. President Bush personally telephoned Sharon

and that clearly showed his personal desire and indeed his interest in immediate withdrawal. But Sharon

to go for the cease-fire. Arafat reportedly wanted to know what Secretary Powell has brought from Sharon in terms of withdrawal of Israeli army.

Apparently Powell did not have

anything to put on the table. Arafat

also did not offer anything in terms of

cease-fire as Powell was not even able to get Arafat's confinement lifted.

Arafat remained holed up in his Ramallah's devastated office where Powell met him. It was really incredible that Powell could not even make

Sharon agree to lift Israel's illegal

siege on Arafat, who was not

Sharon's subject under any definition of the civilized world. Under such a situation it was obvious that Arafat

could not agree to a cease-fire.

Powell's mission was widely

reported as a failure. Yes, it was so in

terms of the final result i.e. the cease-

fire. But one success is already there as the UNSC has unanimously

approved a resolution supporting a

mission to gather information on

Israeli military actions in Jenin.

Hopefully this would establish the

facts in Jenin. Such a resolution

would have normally been impossible unless Powell was in the area. He

had apparently most of the information

regarding Israeli actions in Jenin.

Secretary Powell should be taken

into confidence as he has now full

facts about the region. President

Bush may seriously consider the

Saudi proposal for implementation

and ask Israel to withdraw fully to

1967 borders including withdrawal

from Golan Heights (there may be

some mutually acceptable adjust-

ments in some areas). Palestinian

refugee claims are also to be consid-

ered on compassionate grounds with

the commitment to pay adequate

compensations to those who would

not be able to return to their homes.

Such an arrangement may bring

peace in the region. If full peace is

achieved and all Arab countries go

for normalization of relations with

Israel, then the violence by Hamas

and other radicals would die down.

This would indeed be the best way

to fight terrorism.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and

Ambassador and founder president of North South University

discursive and desultory nature of

Powell's travel itinerary showed that

it was more of a public relations

exercise to preempt criticism of

American inaction than a visit with a

serious purpose. A suspicion

shared by a wide spectrum of public

opinion is that Powell's Middle East

Peace mission was a ploy to buy

time for Sharon to complete his

mission of a final solution of Palesti-

ne problem by destroying all

semblance of the civilian, security

and economic infrastructure of

Palestine Authority so that the idea of

a Palestine State was not viable.

Sponsoring the Security Council

resolution by America for sending

an international fact finding mission to

Zenin may yet be another shrewd

façade for public consumption to

cover up its hidden and private

agenda of support to Israel. The

international community was dismayed by the Bush-White House

for its support to Israel's pro-

Israel policy is not in its own interest.

It is not understood why by supporting

Israel to please the Jewish lobby and

indignity suffered by them in the hands