

It's all a question of governance

Running a country is as much a management issue as it is political

TAKE five recent major events. First the murder of two DCC commissioners in two separate incidents, that of Newton followed by Bina's. Second, the launch disaster in river Meghna in which more than four hundred got killed. The third is the ban on 13 cable TV channels and its withdrawal within the next 12 hours. The fourth is of the millionaire Titas meter reader. The fifth and final instance is the death of Badal in the hands of Detective Branch police who allegedly killed him by administering electric shock while in custody.

On the face of it, these five incidents, three of them tragic, may seem to have no link. But a more serious look reveals a most significant relationship. They are all instances of failure of governance. We have chosen the above instances because they represent different sectors where governance has failed and also the different types of governance failure that exist in Bangladesh today.

The first and the fifth examples are that of the failure of law and order but of two radically different types. One deals with failure to capture the criminals and the second is where the police itself are the criminals. The murder of two DCC commissioners is not the case of some very clever criminals committing very meticulously planned murders and are being able to evade the hands of law in spite of a very effective police attempt to catch them. On the contrary it is more the case that there is so little effective law enforcement that criminals are having a free reign and doing whatever they please right under the very nose of the police. Nothing could be a more direct evidence of failure of governance than the above.

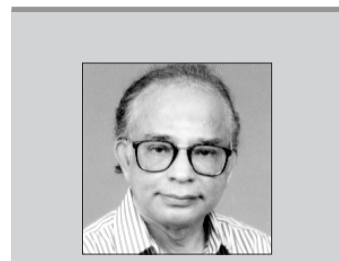
The Meghna launch disaster probably would not have happened if there were better management of river transport sector, better monitoring of the fleet of launches, better quality control of the personnel, especially those who run the vessels, and finally better enforcement of capacity loading of passengers. All these are governance issues. If the relevant bodies performed their due tasks and if the concerned supervisors monitored whether those tasks were performed and if there was a modicum of accountability on the part of the ministry then this and many similar launch disasters could have been averted. Right at this very moment thousands of passengers could be risking their lives travelling on faulty vessels. But that we will never know because the shipping ministry is not bothered. Otherwise immediately after the latest disaster there would have been a frantic search as to whether any other launch had any design or related flaw.

The Titas meter reader millionaire is the most dramatic example of failure of governance of our public institutions. The chain of command has been totally subverted by the politically backed union leaders whose main job is to support the ruling power of the day in exchange of siphoning off hundreds of crores of public money to private coffers, many of which belong to political leaders. If there were a minimum of administration and accountability then Titas would not have come to this pass. Most other public institutions are in a similar situation.

The cable TV ban incident is a good example of how our ministries function in an unthinking manner pushed by various vested groups who are able to usurp policy formulation process. We commend the government for having enough sensible reflex to reverse a bad decision. But the question still needs to be asked as to how such a decision affecting the general public could be taken without any consultation, both within the government and the ruling party and with the civic society at large.

The purpose of our comment is to make the government and the ruling alliance, especially the BNP aware that failure of governance lies at the root of most of our problems as exemplified by the five aforementioned instances. In fact most of what is happening -- or not happening -- in Bangladesh can be linked to one single thing -- failure of governance, the key to which is management of resource and personnel and accountability of action and transparency of purpose. We must understand that running the country is not simply opposition bashing -- both verbally and by the police -- but involves a much wider task of delivering on the most basic needs of the people. Is anybody listening?

How right is far right?



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

IT is not a perfect world. It never was and will never be. Still, order and harmony are expected to triumph over chaos and strife. Unity in diversity is not only a cherished ideal it can be translated in quotidian life. In politics very few ideas are absolutes and public life need not be reductive. All positions in the political spectrum, right, left and centre, have space that can be shared or at least negotiated through rules of engagement.

Many consider the rise of the far right in Europe as ominous. Led by extremist leaders like Le Pen in France, the late Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands, Christoph Blocher in Switzerland and Pia Kjaerogaard in Denmark and others in Europe the far right is haunting the minds of the politically correct. In the rhetoric of the far right many hear the rumblings of nothing less than evil. The apprehension may be right if certain pronouncements and actions are judged selectively. Desecrating Jewish synagogues and cemeteries, tattooing arms, donning of thrash metal music and attacks on ethnic minorities resurrect old memories. But the extreme right is not a monolithic movement with an ironclad ideology. Within the broader political spectrum it represents a substratum which accommodates both commonality and divergences. The leaders of the far right include both ultra extremists and those who are moderately extreme.

Corresponding the views held by them their political manifestos show distinct differences. Some of these differences are more nuanced than others, but discernible nevertheless. Herein lies the hope and the

lesson for others located elsewhere in the continuum. The far right as a whole need not and should not be seen as mortal enemies of the 'other'. In so far they are moderate and some of the issues highlighted by them have merit and enjoy support beyond the fanatic fringe they should be seen as competitors in politics by the mainstream parties. The fact that they have a following among people and seek their mandate through ballot sanitizes them to some extent. The present rise of the

are being governed. Across Europe, the end of cold war and the collapse of socialism have seen mainstream parties of right and left converge in the middle ground thereby limiting a sense of choice for voters. It has often led to governments that are not sympathetic or attentive to the minority views. And they have often recoiled from taking actions that may appear as conservative. Electoral victories of the far right gave them a severe jolt. Hostility to immigration has been

arrived. He was apparently neither anti-Muslim nor anti-black -- so long as these groups agree to become culturally and politically Europeans. In England, Peter Han the minister for Europe, publicly warned the Muslims in Britain last week that backlash against them for isolationism was a greater danger than tension over racial differences. He also expressed concern at the rapid growth in asylum-seekers. It is strange that the UK which have received Muslim immigrants for a

est but also will protect immigrants from exploitation by criminal gangs. In respect of the second aspect of immigration i.e. integration, the balance of advantages and disadvantages involved can be expected to tilt the decision. Now that feelings against isolation and cultural differences have become so strong immigrants, particularly Muslims, should integrate as much as possible with the society and culture of their host countries. As it is, life of immigrants is hard and they should

European super-state that will submerge the individuality of the European nations in an unwieldy federation hobbled by bureaucracy. In countries where coalition government of the right and centre are the rule, where issues and disagreements are muted and smoothed over and problems are allowed to fester such popular sentiments are ignored, the far right allege. The centrist government can no longer afford to think that they know better what is in the interest of their citizens. They have to take a slow but steady approach to European integration. The same applies to expansion of membership and enlargement of EU.

The delivery of public services like education, health and utilities by the present governments in Europe has been a cause of widespread dissatisfaction among citizens. For example, in the UK, the National Health service leaves much to be desired. Frequent train accidents have exposed the creaking system. In both, neither privatization or the public-private collaboration has produced better results and there is growing demand for re-nationalization. The far right is not incorrect when they say that privatization has gone awry and reforms are urgent.

The rise of the right in Europe as seen in electoral results is a cautionary tale for the continent's centrist coalition governments in power. While the far right can be rejected for spread of hate and racism, their espousal of popular grievances over areas as mentioned above can highly be faulted. If the far right is right about anything it is in its identification of the emergent problems. The left and centre parties can only ignore these at the expense of their popularity. They have every reason to be grateful to the far right for an object lesson in real politic. This is the least that is expected in a less than perfect world.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

IN MY VIEW

The rise of the right in Europe as seen in electoral results is a cautionary tale for the continent's centrist coalition governments in power. While the far right can be rejected for spread of hate and racism, their espousal of popular grievances over areas as mentioned above can highly be faulted. If the far right is right about anything it is in its identification of the emergent problems. The left and centre parties can only ignore these at the expense of their popularity.

far right in Europe is nothing more than a warning signal, a wake up call to the complacent mainstream politicians. Results in local and national elections have bluntly conveyed the message that political correctness does not mean ignoring the minority view as long as it is not blatantly odious or irrational.

If extremist politicians like Le Pen and the late Pim Fortuyn took their national politics by storm this was not least because of their growing popularity. Voters supported them both far positive and negative reasons. Along with conviction of extremist ideology, dissatisfaction with the politics and governance of the left and centre coalition governments led voters to the direction of the far right. The grievances that pushed the far right forward are common in all the countries of Europe. Their supporters are angry about seemingly unstoppable immigration, rising crime, overburdened public services and loss of national identity. Taken together the fears, anxieties and anger of a segment of the electorate can be seen as a rejection of the status quo in national politics and the way they

the single most burning issue agitating the minds of Europeans. Those in the extreme right may be more vocal, but it is a sentiment shared more or less by everyone. Le Pen's strident rhetoric against immigrants and ethnic minorities had echoes in many neighboring countries and he seemed to be speaking the language of a new class of hard right across Europe. But while the sentiment is shared by many the solutions are not so universal. Le Pen has often excoriated immigrants in vile language and threatened to send them back to their home countries if his party came to power. Mr. Pim Fortuyn, on the other hand, demanded a ban on further immigration and integration of the existing immigrants. He singled out the Muslim immigrants in particular for their isolationist attitude and refusal to integrate. He went to the extent of branding Islam as culturally backward and illiberal. But his position was more nuanced than Le Pen's and his language was more subtle when it came to conclusions. While advocating zero tolerance for new immigration he was not in favour of deporting those who had already

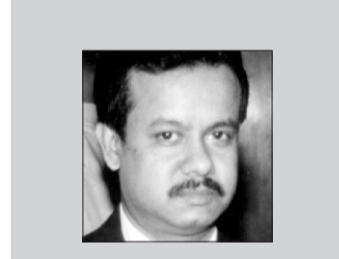
longer period than mainland Europe should identify the problem so late.

Obviously, there are two aspects of immigration that arc at issue: their number and multiculturalism vs integration. The first problem stems from the fact that Europe is still struggling with a system of political asylum designed in the 19th century. Mass travel and the disappearance of borders have brought influx of asylum seekers who are actually economic migrants. Regarding illegal immigration the national policy and enforcement of the same in many countries are to blame. As a columnist in the British daily The Independent wrote recently (12th May) "Our immigration policy is to let in an unlimited number of immigrants, then treat them badly or pretend they do not exist. The lack of policy is approval of a system that corrupts and criminalises" Government taxes, on the other hand, have aggravated this situation by encouraging employers to get labour from contractors. A harmonized asylum policy across Europe as well as enforceable immigration policies in member countries are not only in their inter-

not make it harder by sticking to such customs and practices as dress, native language and women's status. Muslims have been specially targeted for hateful behaviour and attacks because in their daily life in public they flaunt their differences starkly. But for integration to be successful the host country has also to provide equal opportunities for education, housing and employment. If immigrants are given only jobs that are disliked by the local people and forced to live in rundown areas because of poverty integration cannot take place. It takes two to integrate.

Integration of countries within the supra-national framework of Europe has raised both hopes and suspicions. While welcoming economic benefits many in member countries seem reluctant to plunge headlong into a federation under the centralized power in Brussels. Opinion surveys by the European Commission periodically ask whether people feel more national or European. The results consistently affirm the stubbornness of national identity. To the far right Euro represents a step towards a

Crime and innocence



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

I asked him why he committed crimes, and he said that man, like his world, evolved in days and nights. He said he had the bright side and the dark side, a loving man, who cared for his family, friends, relatives and neighbours, putting his life in line more than once to defend the lives and honours of others. Then he also has this uncontrollable rage, when the sun sets on his judgements and draws him into the impulses of darkness.

He said that he had lied, stolen, snatched, extorted, and threatened, but never raped or killed in his life. He said he was wicked, not criminal. I told him that he was in police custody many times in his life and law makes no difference between wickedness and crime since it finds that a man is guilty and puts him behind the bars. He argued that what he did were petty offences, which only helped him grope in the dark alleys of his struggle to survive. But killing people was a different matter, it was like eliminating a rival

player because he couldn't be contained with intimidation, tactics and guile. Killing someone was ultimate cowardice committed in the utmost desperation of misguided courage. Rape according to him is when the soul of its perpetrator is molested in the body of his victim.

Two things dominated judgements of men, he explained. One is prudence and another is passion. The civilized man is distinguished from the savage mainly by prudence, which means he has the ability to use his forethought. Thus a

said that it was a contradiction of terms like hot ice cream, because murder, however coolly committed, is a decision taken in the heat of the moment. Then he re-iterated that he had never killed in his life, a vice he despised even in his most wicked mind.

Once again I asked why he committed crimes in his wicked minds. He replied that he was driven by his instincts, a strong if not actually irresistible impulse to crime, which the Greeks called *ate*. But then he does it only to people

ogy was full of instances of the pattern of human destiny, emerging from the unbreakable cycle of mischief. Tantalos began his career by a direct offence against the gods as he tried to cheat them into eating the flesh of his own son Pelops. Pelops who is miraculously restored to life, offended in his own turn. He won the chariot-race against Oinamos, king of Pisa, by the connivance of Oinamos's charioteer Myrtilos. Instead of rewarding Myrtilos, Pelops got rid of him by flinging him into the sea. Pelops's

penance for sins of another. Who made him do the mischief, which has been the means of his livelihood, and where did he inherit the instincts for them? People say his father solicited bribes and consorted with women other than his wife, and the sons were to expiate with their lives. But one of his brothers escaped the curse and managed to live decent life. Now who decided which brother should be spared the burden of their father's guilt? Who decided that he should become corrupt and contemptible in

illusion of hallucination recovering from hallucination.

Is he ever pricked by his conscience? I would like to know. He demurred and then indifferently said that conscience was nothing but the reflection of the world on the mirror of one's soul. The world reflected on his mirror was one of convenience, where he never thought it was a crime to seize the opportunity. What has he done if not only bend a few rules so that he never missed the opportunity of availing every opportunity which came his way?

How was it then wrong to kill, if one saw it convenient for him? He looked quizzical and then readily replied that there was no sport in the killing of a man. Of course, people would kill to defend life, property and honor and that is a separate issue altogether. Even God and law would understand when one is forced to kill. But crime is when lives are taken or honours despoiled to further one's scheme, when man in his animal spirit crosses the last bounds of his rationality.

The criminal then approached my ears and whispered to ask why I wanted to know so much about him. I told him that I was only curious to know if a mischievous mind ever regretted its mistakes. He nodded his head, and then smiled at me. Not to know you sin is innocence my friend, he said. That is the only bliss and forget the rest.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

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civilized man would endure his present pain for the sake of future pleasure. It was this prudence which gave rise to agriculture, because man saw it in his interest to work in the spring to have food in the winter. A baby conceived today would be born nine months later. Man sows virtues in this world to reap rewards in the next one.

Whereas passion is purely instinctive, when man acts impulsively without thinking. Most crimes originate in passionate reflex, although people often talk about cold-blooded murder. The criminal

who push him too far, or if someone pays him to do it. It is perfectly moral to get even with one's enemy, or commit a few misdeeds to earn one's living.

Before I could say anything he continued that he was not blessed with any other skills except keeping a straight face even in the most difficult times. He knew how to con people, how to confuse and coerce them while his conscience cavorted in the consecration of mischief. Mischief belies the origin of man since Eve invented Adam into eating of the forbidden Apple. Then he said that Greek mythol-

sons Atreus and Thyestes suffered for his sins. Thyestes corrupted his brother's wife, and Atreus recalling his brother under pretext of reconciliation, feasted him on the flesh of his own children. In his turn Atreus's son Agamemnon offended Artemis by killing a sacred stag, and was murdered by his faithless wife Klytinaemestra and her lover Aigisthos, a surviving son of Thyestes. Orestes, Agamemnon's son, in turn avenged his father by killing his mother and Aigisthos.

He said that the crimes of men are perpetuated in the cycle of a curse that one generation will do the

character and conviction to bear the scar of his ancestor's blame?

I asked him that if right and wrong was a matter of fate or inheritance, then how could we judge crime from innocence? How could we justify punishment of the guilty and rewarding of the virtuous? He said he didn't know the answer to my questions, because how could the fish ever have the wisdom of an Ichthyologist? Man lives under the water of his unfolding destiny and by the time he gets to grasp its meaning, he is over with his life. The criminal said that he was now old and tired, his mind wobbling in the

Likud and tour d'horizon

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

LIKUD party has said no to the creation of a Palestinian state. So, what is new? Prime Minister who reportedly piloted a milder resolution which would have given him flexibility in future negotiation with the Palestinians and Arabs was defeated. Yet he did not resign (he cannot be ousted just because his opponents had a majority in the party); promised to implement the Likud resolution albeit closely stalked by his nemesis Benjamin Netanyahu. One wonders whether it is not a good cop-bad cop scenario of Hollywood movies. After all there are fundamental differences between Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu? Formed in 1973 Likud had always been a rightwing coalition block. Its first Prime Minister Menachem Begin (1977-1983), a Polish born Jew, had been a leader of Irgun-landestine Jewish organization formed in 1931-- and in close cooperation with Haganah it soon assumed its extreme character. In 1988 parliamentary elections when Likud and Labour parties won the same number of seats and formed a coalition; Likud opposed an international peace conference; encouraged building many more Jewish settlements in occupied

territories; and wished to retain control over all of West Bank and Gaza Strip. Foreign policy of Likud was always militant. Indeed in February this year Prime Minister Sharon in an interview to an Israeli newspaper-Marriv-regretted not having killed Yasser Arafat twenty years ago when he had the chance during the invasion of Lebanon. One can not but be surprised at the audacity and/or insensitivity of such "leaders" with whom civilized people have to have dealings with. Looks like inmates are running the asylum. It is the misfortune of the Muslims in general and the Arabs in particular that things have come down to this level. No one supports unarmed Israeli civilians to be blown into pieces. After all they were all going around doing their daily chores. But then again no could equally support brutalization by the Israeli army of the Palestinian refugee camps; assassination of Palestinian leaders and officials; refusal entry to UN delegation to see for themselves the Israeli atrocities and the total destruction wrought by them. One wonders whether Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu et al are locked in a fight to replace Pierce Brosnan as the next James Bond. How have come to this pass? Have strength and weakness have

become such decisive determinants that Israelis have forgotten the fable of David and Goliath? When in the late 19th century Theodor Herzl, the founding father of Zionist movement, published Der Judenstaat, The Jewish state, his book was received with derision by the leading European Jews of the time. Balfour Declaration of early Twentieth century, a masterpiece of diplomatic obfuscation, which promised everything everybody did not foresee the Israel of today. The imperialist powers of the day thought that Israel would essentially represent a modern western state among the sabre rattling Arabs. The British government had hoped that the Balfour Declaration would help rally Jewish opinion, particularly in the US, in favor of the allies and that Jewish settlements in Palestine favourable to Britain, would help protect the approaches to the Suez Canal and the road to India. To dispel growing doubts among the Arabs about real British intentions then British Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill in 1922 explained that the Balfour Declaration meant not the "imposition of a Jewish nationality upon the inhabitants of Palestine as a whole" and the British government did not contemplate "the disappearance or the subordination of the Arabic

people, language and culture in Palestine". Lot of water has flown under the bridge since then. 1967 war, 1973 war, 1977 President Sadat's visit to Israel, Camp David Peace Accord, Oslo Agreement, so-called Camp David II, Senator Mitchell and CIA Director Tenet's unsuccessful attempts to secure a cease fire to name a few. In March this year, the UN Security Council for the first time endorsed an independent Palestinian State. Arab League Summit promised Israel peace, security and normal relations in return for a full withdrawal from occupied Arab lands, establishment of a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a "fair solution" of the Palestinian refugees. Meanwhile US backed a UN Resolution calling on Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territories.

My submission is that one should not be surprised over the negative resolution of the Likud Party as the foundation of the party was based on negation of Palestinian rights. Nor one should be amazed at the genocidal barbarity of the Israeli army under Sharon against unarmed Palestinians on the pretext that the so-called Palestinians have to be rooted out. What, however, surprised many was the audacious Israeli response

to the efforts of the US President and his administration. Indeed former National Security Advisor Brezinski in a blistering attack on the futile US shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East was constrained to say that when annual aid (US dollars three billion) given to Israel by the US is seen as an entitlement then the administration can hardly expect to use it as a clout to reason with a delinquent recipient. It is past time for the world to realize our total abhorrence towards terrorism notwithstanding the desperation of the suicide bombers will not cease unless they see the life they are being forced to lead is still better than the one they prepared to lay down. Western guilt complex for a horrendous aberration perpetrated by a mad man fifty years ago can not be assuaged by the continuance of injustice against a people who had no part in the Inquisition process of the yesteryears. At another time and in another era (1794) Robespierre had said: "until when the fury of tyranny continue to be called justice, and the justice of the people barbarity and rebellion"?

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a retired secretary to Bangladesh government and former ambassador

OPINION

Remove the ban on Matir Moina

NAEEM MOHAEMEN
THE Bangladesh Film Censor Board (FCB) has refused to issue a censor certificate to the film Matir Moina (Clay bird). This ruling overturns the earlier decision by the FCB which is a division of the Ministry of Information) to issue an 'uncut' certificate to the film. In a letter to the director Tareque Masud, the FCB said the film should not be released in public as it contains "religiously sensitive" material. This decision comes as a great surprise to those who have seen the film. The nation's leading newspaper The Daily Star called it a "sensitive portrayal of a multicultural and multi-religious Bangladesh". The film is set against the historical backdrop of Bangladesh's 1971 liberation war in which three million people were killed by the Pakistan army. The lead character is a madrassah (Islamic religious school) student and is based on the personal experiences of the director Tareque Masud. Mr Masud is a former madrassah student and said in a newspaper interview, "I made the movie as a fellow Muslim and wanted to inform people about the life in a madrassah that has both strict and liberal teachers... As a former madrassah student, I have portrayed not only the religious tolerance and broadmindedness of Bangladesh society but also a positive, credible

and objective pictures of the country against the negative propaganda of western media about madrassahs" (The Daily Star).

Expressing surprise at the decision, The Daily Star wrote in an editorial: "Given that the film depicts madrassah education in a very sensitive light and presents the socio-religious contradictions in any society trying to adjust to the modern world, one is left wondering what caused the ire of the censors. In fact the film takes a very sympathetic view of madrassah education which contrasts radically with Western of Muslim religious education in such institutions."

The FCB's decision comes at a time when the film is receiving attention all over the world and creating a positive image for Bangladesh. Matir Moina was selected as the opening film for the prestigious Directors Fortnight section of the Cannes Film Festival. This is the first time a Bangladeshi film has been included in this world-renowned festival. On May 16th, the film's premiere received a standing ovation at Cannes. Responding to public demand, the festival organizers added three special screenings of the film. On May 17th, the film was released in France nationwide by the French distributor MK2 (<http://www.mk2.com/oiseau/argile/index.html>).

MK2 is an internationally

renowned distribution house and is responsible for bringing the Iranian films of Abbas Kiarostami to a global audience. Variety, the leading newspaper of the US film industry, called Matir Moina an "accomplished, emotionally involving film -- an intimately observed story of divisions within a family that reflect the wider clash between moderate and extremist views."

In an interview with The Daily Star, Tareque Masud said, "(It is) a good opportunity to project a different image of Bangladesh. I hope that the film's selection will also inspire my fellow film-makers, particularly the younger generation, to strive for a better cinema and to try to bring our vision of our rich culture and heritage to the rest of the world."

Matir Moina provides a nuanced and subtle view of Islam, rather than the stereotypical Islam-bashing of western media. We believe the FCB of Bangladesh has committed a grave error by banning this film. This action will only give ammunition to those who portray Islamic culture as rigid and unyielding. Rather than protecting religious sentiments, the ban will only stifle open discussion and progressive change. We urge the FCB to reconsider their decision and give the film the censorship clearance necessary for its domestic release in Bangladesh.