directions that could be adopted

This method of consultations was

first initiated during the caretaker

government when Bandladesh

received an unanticipated request

for use of its airspace and other

infrastructure facilities by the US

government before its attack on

Taliban-led Afghanistan. The policy

of all party consultations of experts should be evolved into a standard

practice in conjunction with an

effective functioning of a Standing

Committee on Parliamentary

Affairs. This would allow Bangla-

DHAKA SATURDAY JUNE 15, 2002

Nation awaits PM's lead

Directionless cabinet desperately needs a reshuffle and reinvigoration

HAT is the government doing, is the most common question in the public mind today. There does not seem to be any direction in most of the ministries. Except for Saifur Rahman, who at times seems a bit too abrasive and unnecessarily confrontational, and perhaps with one or two other exceptions, no other minister gives any indication of being in command and going anywhere. While the Environment Ministry continues to bask in the now fading glory of banning polythene shopping bags early on it does very little about the serious tasks of preventing air pollution, river pollution and deforestation. While we appreciate the state minister for education's zeal in catching the cheaters in the board exams we know nothing about the ministry's plans and actions regarding stemming the rot in the overall quality of our education.

Nothing is being done about controlling the tremendous wastage in our government. Our inability to prioritise our needs and then take timely decisions to meet them results in cost overrun, wrong choices of technologies and failure to meet deadlines. All this leads to one of the highest levels of wastage in government operation anywhere in the world.

BNP, when in opposition, rejoiced at the fact that Transparency International termed Bangladesh as the most corrupt country in the world and pledged in its election campaign to give the highest priority in fighting it if elected. People elected them to power but has the BNP done anything to fight corruption?

All its commitments to separate the judiciary from the executive, to set up an independent anticorruption bureau, appoint an ombudsman, free BTV and Bangladesh Radio of government control are now on the back burner. In fact a proactive judicial decision on separation of judiciary is being gradually killed through planned delay by a group of motivated bureaucrats. In the meantime orchestrated whisper campaign is being carried out that such a move will further loosen government control and as such deteriorate the law and order situation.

In the case of local government a most absurd position is being gradually built up to justify a central role of the MPs in all the work of the local bodies. The global experience is that once an MP is given a decisive role in a local body's activities then all other locally elected representatives are relegated to a secondary position and lose initiative and spontaneity. More importantly, the legislative function of a member of parliament becomes seriously compromised when he/she is involved in the development work at the grassroots level. But tragically our MPs seem to prefer to distribute wheat and other handout rather than make laws. And we all know why.

All the above and many other similar issues (we did not talk about law and order because much has been written about it already) are all problems of governance or the lack of it. BNP does not seem to learn, even after a full term in office, that running the country is far more complex than winning an election. While the latter feeds on rhetoric the former is killed by it. Fundamental to development and progress of a nation is the central question of governance.

It is thus that we, the nation, await the lead of the Prime Minister. Her nearly one month stay in the US for medical reasons have cost her valuable time. The first and the most important decision that the PM needs to make is about her cabinet. It is now clear that all her ministerial colleagues are not her assets. There is an absence of collegiate spirit and instead of working as a team, sometimes it works at cross purposes. There is also the whole perception of Hawa Bhavan being an alternative power centre. At times public perception is as crucial in politics as are facts, and the above public perception is harming Khaleda Zia and her government. She must also urgently rid her party of all criminal elements (see our commentary published on 11 June).

It is high time for hard decisions and the Prime Min-

The case of the missing Morshed Committee report



M ANWARUL HAQ

HEN the Turkish ambassador to Bangladesh during the course of an interview on impending trip of President Suleyman Demirel to Dhaka came to know that I would be visiting China the following week to attend a UN conference, he said," You must meet our ambassador in Beijing to learn more about Turkey." He called up his counterpart on the telephone and having been unable to reach him at his office left a message. He handed me his calling card with a note addressed to his Turkish counterpart based in China.

I told ambassador Kemal Ozcan Davaz that day in July, 1996 that I could know more about Turkey from him later, but he insisted that I meet his counterpart in distant Beijing "as he can let you know more about Turkey's relations, foreign policy and links with China.

Needless to say, I was amazed at the diplomatic skill and efforts of a foreign envoy to sell his country not only in Bangladesh where he was posted but also in distant China.

In that sense, we have our own corps of diplomats, many of whom possess excellent skills and a sense of zeal to market their country. We also have many who do not measure up so well. Some of them have professional competency and are well qualified academically for the job of a diplomat. But in reality it is not only the qualifications that count but it is both the style and substance -- that ability to appreciate the image and interest of the country abroad that really matters.

For a small country like Bangla desh, the challenge of a diplomat is even more formidable since we have so little to sell, so much to ask for and so challenging a work to perform to present an upbeat profile of our country

Are we preparing our foreign office personnel up to the new tasks and challenges in a world that is becoming increasingly complex

with every passing day? Are we giving them the right environment the right incentives and the right positions to deliver?

There has been talk of giving thrust on economic diplomacy for several years now. That means making meaningful changes in the nature of the diplomats and revamping the conventional setup of the foreign ministry

Considering the need for change to give a boost to economic diplomacy, then BNP government in 1994 set up a special committee headed by Manzur Morshed Khan,

as proposed in the report

Prepared in two volumes, the report contained more than 50 recommendations and several observations. The Committee members picked up for their wide expertise interviewed more than 150 experts in foreign policy and

In a major recommendation, the committee said that the functions of all personnel working in diplomatic and consular missions abroad be brought under a single unified command. It proposed that all officers or personnel whether from

The committee emphasised that 70 per cent of ambassadorial posts earmarked for BCS(FA) cadre should be adhered to strictly. The committee said that it was informed of dissatisfaction in the foreign service cadre with introduction of seniority rules which favoured lateral entrants and "put the coregroup of foreign service officers at a serious disadvantage and also caused a lack of overall promotion prospects.

It also observed: "The most pernicious effect of seniority rules is

should not be expanded significantly for making it a very effective training academy both for fresh entrants and also for mid-ranking diplomats

It should also be mandatory to develop foreign language skills including English, French, Arabic and some others. Mentionably it is the communication skill of a diplomat that matters most and this includes taking not only language courses but also acquiring skills as to how to communicate with the local and foreign press. Diplomats who know how to handle the press

desh to have a common foreign policy position on major issues despite political differences. Many of our diplomats are posted abroad for a longer stretch of time than stipulated. Many get preferential postings or even repostings as a special consideration or for personal and political connections. The ground rule for transfers and postings should only be violated as an exception and not as a routine. The foreign ministry needs capable officers not only in its foreign missions but also to run its

territorial and other desks at the headquarters. Many feel, that some of our diplomats due to the nature of their job live in a different world than that of the real Bangladesh. Sometimes they serve for several years at a stretch in important positions overseas even enjoying their home leave abroad. Although their number is a handful, this definitely

makes them 'out of touch.' This can be better compensated and some of them can be better enlightened by posting them on rotation basis while at headquarters to serve at least a year in various ministries such as Commerce. Industries, Labour and Manpower, Agriculture, ERD and organizations like BOI and BEPZA. These postings could also rub both ways. Personnel serving in the different departments could familiarize the professional diplomats with their activities and working methods while they themselves could learn the need for delivering prompt

In conclusion, I believe there are more committed Bangladeshi diplomats than ambassador Kemal Ozcan Davaz. Optimism and effective utilisation of their skill and aptitude should be the point of effort.

Correspondent of The Daily Star

ACCORD AND DISCORD

The foreign minister deserves credit for calling a meeting of former foreign ministers and former foreign secretaries to discuss foreign policy directions that could be adopted... The policy of all party consultations of experts should be evolved into a standard practice in conjunction with an effective functioning of a Standing Committee on Parliamentary Affairs. This would allow Bangladesh to have a common foreign policy position on major issues despite political differences.

special envoy to the Prime Minister

The recommendations of the Committee headed by Morshed Khan who was also then a member of Parliamentary Standing Committee on foreign affairs was prepared n seven months time.

The report could not be implenented as by then the BNP government was replaced by the Awami League. But, while the BNP is again back in governance and eight months into power and the former special envoy himself heading the foreign ministry, the Morshed Committee report is still in the cold stor-

When the minister himself was asked some time back, he replied that it would come before the cabi net and after it was endorsed it wil proceed for implementation

We do not know if the Morshed Committee report contains all the required recommendations for spurring our diplomats to be more productive or hold the real key for a congenial overhaul of the foreign ministry. But going through the report, it can be said, many of the recommendations, even after seven years are good for implementation We do not need to go through another bureaucratic exercise and form another committee to examine the report. What is now important is to put the recommendations into practice by setting up a Task Force the cadre service or other ministries should be working under the direct supervision of the ambassador or high commissioner. The existing practice gave scope for the officers posted from different cadre services to work and report directly to their respective ministries, often keeping the head of the mission in the dark or without effective supervisory con-

What is significant is that the report suggested abolition of all wings in missions, noting that "interministerial bickerings, incidence of insubordination, indiscipline, wastage of valuable resources due to proliferation of wings have reached a stage where most of our missions have ceased to function as a cohesive factor."

The Committee also suggested that 'some technical posts' in the missions abroad could continue to be manned by officers of other ministries on the basis of secondment to Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It suggested that the officers going on secondment should undergo a three-month training at the Foreign Service Academy and during their posting remain under the administrative control of the foreign ministry.

It said that 20 per cent of the economic and commercial posts in the missions may be filled up from the private sector, as is the case presently with press/information to be seen in the case of lateral entrants from Defence Services who counted their seniority from

There are scores of other suggestions, which we may discuss

But two aspects relating to training and exposure of diplomats needs to be mentioned before other

The Morshed Committee suggested restoration of the Foreign Affairs Training Institute and renaming it Foreign Service Academy Although this has happened, and the Foreign Service Academy now lodged at the Sugandha is a picturesque place, but it is underutilized, to say the least Most Principals of the Academy take it as their dumping ground, which indeed it has come to be.

There is no substitute to good training for our diplomats. It is therefore imperative that the Foreign Service Academy should be upgraded to a proper training institution having provisions for higher training programmes and reorientation courses. If the country can have a highly rated Defence Services Command and Staff College and the National Defence College for its military officers corps where foreign students also come the budget and status of the Foreign Service Academy for our diplomats

their country. No good diplomat ever gives out national secrets, but only explains policies. Talking to the press helps media people to keep abreast of real developments and this will scotch needless media speculation. At the same time scope should

can win friends for themselves and

be provided for our diplomats to visit and study at internationally recognised foreign training academies and institutions. More scholarships should be provided and more diplomats should be allowed to avail of further training opportunities. Any investment made in the field of training and scholarship would bring dividends by developing the skills of our diplomats. Even veteran diplomats need to return to training institutes to keep abreast of the latest skills and also share their experiences with the students The Morshed Committee sug-

deal with evolving situations 'for maneuverability ' in the conduct of foreign policy. This is a most essential requirement for anticipating different crises and the possible responses that could be made. The foreign minister deserves credit for calling a meeting of former

foreign ministers and former foreign

secretaries to discuss foreign policy

their international trade or is it the

gested the creation of a research

and policy planning wing in the

foreign ministry for analysis of

events and preparation of options to

M Anwarul Hag is Diplomatic and Defence

OPINION

Hunt down Sony's killers

A.K.M.A. QUADER

ONY'S premature demise by terrorist's bullet at BUET campus has shocked us except, of course, those who perpetrate and harbour terrorism. We have failed to provide safety to Sony in the campus. We are ashamed of our failure. For her parents it was an irreparable loss and tragedy; for a teacher to deliver her lifeless body to her parents was a Himalayan burden. I wish there be no more victims like Sonv anywhere around us in future. No word is enough to console Sony's parents, grandma and brothers. May Allah rest her soul in peace! Parents do not send their children to Schools and Universities to be shot dead by terrorists. But Bangladesh is now the exception where the academic institutions have become the safe heaven for the goons, extortionists and hijackers having mighty godfathers with political approval. Today's politicians irrespective of shade and opinion are responsible for promoting guns and goons in the academic campuses for political ends. These politicians are faceless, heartless and devoid of self-respect. Since the politicians do not treat each other with dignity and humility, they take us as one of them and make us suffer.

Those responsible for Sony's demise are not faceless or nameless. They have their own identity, they have institutional identity, they

have political affiliation, they have godfathers, they have been seen in the company of our state leadership, they have been known to the police. they have their nicknames derived from their bravados.

Those allegedly having BUET connections in the recent months led the students to disrupt academic programme there. They are known to the students as "bhai" and the students chanted slogans threatenquences if these bhais would be touched for their misdemeanors. Even on the fateful day of June 8, the students boycotted the classes to watch the world cup matches by barricading the main entrance. They refused to listen to the repeated requests of Vice Chancellor. Director of Students' Welfare and other teachers to come to the classes. And with their political mentors, these brats (bhais) have become untouchables. When the Vice Chancellor or members of academic council cannot get appointment of the Chancellor or the Ministers, these brats can always get a half dozen of ministers in the campus if they want. This is the darkest side of our students' perception of university education. In spite of all kinds of intimidation, BUET has made efforts over the years to show some semblance of discipline.

The government has always ignored BUET not being a constituency to any political party. Sony's premature death could have been averted if the Government and Home Secretary would have read the letters addressed to them in recent days hinting the impending disasters.

Its ordinance and statutes for upholding and preserving the academic discipline bind a university. Criminal activities by any one in the campus cannot be dealt with the provisions of ordinance and statutes the university. These are to be dealt with the law of the country and criminals are to be pursued accordingly. I do not consider the academic institutions as sacrosanct for criminals who are to be hunted down wherever they are.

It is a moral choice for the Chancellor of BUET to set an example, for years to come, that the state mobilizes and directs its resource to hunt down Sony's killers and puts them in the dock for trial. Let me make it clear that police and Attorney General's office are not under the jurisdiction of BUET, these offices work under political directives. Our only guiding force is our conscience, perception of life and value. But, we are pledge bound to the departed soul of Sony to hunt down her killers wherever they are.

Dr. A.K.M.A. Quader is Professor of Chemica Engineering, BUET.

What is transhipment? transhipment or transit. but is it for

KHANDAKER R ZAMAN, FCIT

T is interesting that the DS Diplomatic and Defence Correspondent has raised the issue of transhipment. Anwarul Haq while writing on the issue starts with an interesting comment of Mr. I K Gujaral but does not address the issue to the disappointment of many readers like myself who have an interest in the subject. Transhipment and Transit to third

countries are certainly the features of trade and transport of the time and so, the policy framers of Bangladesh should seriously look into the possibilities of allowing the same for the international trade of neighbouring countries. I personally feel that it is not Bangladesh which will be unwilling to promote the transhipment trade but whether our big neighbour will be willing to support the idea is going to be the question. The reasons are obvious and we have already experienced the bitter truth in the international trade of Nepal. I shall prefer to call it the attitude instead of mindset Although trade and commerce are mutually agreed arrangements but the reality is that the stronger partner often imposes its wishes on the weaker partner and as soon as the weaker partner gives in, the game is over in perpetuity Mr. Hag seems to have made a

confusing statement that, the Indians have always tagged giving free market access as a supplement to getting transit or transhipment. Indians may have been asking for

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

corridor for the movement of their domestic trade through Bangladesh? Transhipment or transit will only apply if it is the movement of international trade like the example of Nepal with which Mr. Haq started his write up. Movement of India's internal or domestic trade through Bangladesh just cannot be a transhipment or transit trade. For all practical purposes, it is a corridor no matter what name or names are given to it. We have heard many terms being floated by politicians and traders alike e.g. re-shipment. re-export etc and I am sure many more terms are in the pipeline until the corridor gets its way.

I have a few questions and a few ecommendations in response to Mr. Hag's article

He mentions smuggling of Bangladeshi products into Tripura and recommends opening up of official, or I would say, legal channels for an increased trade and a more economic distribution system. My question is will India allow Bangladeshi products free access? Or is it again tied up with the corridor facility that she so desperately He talks of the currency for

payments in the event transit or transhipment is allowed to Tripura's, oresumably, international trade. find the question rather inappropriate while those who are associated with trade and transport know just too well that all international transactions of the country are made in US dollar. Since we are discussing

international transport, it has to be in international currency and in the case of Bangladesh, in US dollar to minimise any complication. And so ocean shipping being a mode of international transport, our port authorities also levy charges on foreign ships calling at Bangladesh ports in US dollar. It will indeed be a new horizon for Bangladesh when we shall see that India has allowed her seven eastern states as well as two other land-locked countries to use Bangladesh ports for the movement of their respective international trade and commerce. We certainly look forward to that day. And why re-export (corridor)

first? If anything India must allow the movement of international trade of the land-locked countries and her own seven eastern states first and only then if at all, we can look into the corridor. It is not commercially correct nor in the interest of Bangladesh to give in to Indian pressure and allow them the corridor without studying the long term benefits that India would reciprocate. We as a nation made some serious historical misjudgements Farakka, Berubari, giving access to Indian goods without India reciprocating -- are a few to cite. We cannot afford to repeat our mistakes and leave it for our children to bear the

Khandaker R Zaman is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport

TO THE EDITOR

TO THE EDITOR TO THE

FEER

On June 12 there was an article in The Daily Star about Amin Ali Howlader of Arambagh, Motilheel. Dhaka, suing the FEER for Tk. 12,000 corers. I thought it was just another nonsense suit and paid no attention to the article. Nor did The Daily Star's report give me much reason to think otherwise

However I saw in the BBC or June 13 that this gentleman is described as the leader of a radical Muslim group the Khelafat Majlish. The article also says that Mr Howladar's group is a member of the Islamic alliance, which is a partner in the governing four-party coalition in Bangladesh.

A member of the 4-party alliance bringing about a suit against FEER is a whole different ball game from one further clogging up the court dockets. Either the BBC is misinformed or The Daily Star did not give this issue due coverage.

Regardless of the details of Mr. Howladar I was quite surprised to see no editorial or article criticising

the fact that the FEER's Bangladesh Correspondent Syed Kamaluddin have been made respondent in the case. If indeed Mr. Howladar is a member of the 4party alliance this would constitute an attack on the freedom of the press and another debacle for our already tarnished image. Dhaka

Argentina

Argentineans are out of the World Cups! Even more amazing England makes it to the second round in the Group of Death! Anything can happen now.

gland might even win! 'We still believe We still believe We still believe It's coming home It's coming home It's coming Football's coming home"

Three Lions, the '98 English World Cup song Dhaka

Getting the facts right

As a keen follower of defence and military affairs of Bangladesh, I read with interest the report "Hasan Mashud made new Army Chief (June 12). Unfortunately, the report contains some mistakes. First of all, the report mentions the abbreviated designation of the Chief of the Army Staff as 'COAS'.

The other mistake relates to the early military career of the outgoing CAS, Lt. General Harun-ar-Rashid. BP. The report says that General Harun "joined the Pakistan Military Academy in 1970 as a member of the War Commission...". In fact, he was not a member of anything called a 'War Commission' but he was commissioned in the Pakistan Army in its 56th War Course (batch). The report also did not mention the post-nominals of the new CAS that go after his name. His post-

nominals are 'awc' and 'psc'. Then there is another mistake which is the spelling of the name of the new CAS. The report spelled the name as 'Major General Hasan

Mashud Chowdhury'. The correct spelling of his name along with his post-nominals would be 'Major General Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury, awc, psc'

Tashdique Mannan Department of International Relations, DU

Our Correspondent

There has been an error of omission and another of commission as rightly pointed out by the writer. Inadvertently CAS has been written as COAS while the spelling of the middle name of the new Army chief should read as "Mashhud". The inadvertent errors are regretted. In newspaper reporting, mention

of belonging to a war commission is implied as passing out from a 'Wai Course. Similarly post nominals, as mentioned by the writer are normally used in government handouts or in formal bio-data when printed routine news reports. Not using it in the report was not to undermine the new chief's honour as it seems to have been implied. In fact the new Army chief, Major General Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury was far more glorified when it was mentioned in the report that he was a graduate of US Army War College, whose abbreviated nominal is awc. Referring to General Mashhud's passing staff college (psc) would have been superfluous because it was mentioned in the report that he "headed the two most prestigious defence institutions of the country", namely the Staff College and the National Defence College.

What is going on with the BNP govern-

I have been closely following the recent trends of our present government for the last couple of months. I have to say I am quite disappointed (as is being carried separately by at the government amendments to The Daily Star) and not always in improve the country's frustrating

situation. It seems to me the government is very vengeful and only interested in making the rich become richer and poor become poorer. Increasing taxes on food items is only going to hurt the impoverished population. The government has also

decided to tax the NGOs. As far as I know these NGOs have helped the poor people more than anyone in the last decade and hindering their work will only act as an action taken against the poor. I have worked with one of the NGOs, before I came to the US. And I know that the government's claim that a number of NGOs are involvement in politics is nothing more than a propaganda. And what is this ban on reconditioned cars! Are these automobiles really a threat to the environment? I don't think so! There are so many elements in the society which are polluting the environment to a great extent but the government always overlook those. BNP's decision to import only brand new cars seems

as a conspiracy to create a monopoly in the automobile business.

If BNP continues to run the country this way, things will never improve in my beloved Bangladesh. Kamal Chowdhury

"El Dorado and the end of Innocence"

"El Dorado and the end of the innocence" by Dr KAS Murshid is rather a flamboyant article amongst other articles about economy, globalisation etc. There are some touches of his philosophy too.

But I have a few things to say. He's written in his article. "Ah. the grandeur of simplification! I have sometimes wondered who have benefited or stand to benefit the most from this change." I appreciate that he may believe (as it appears to me) in the definition of uniqueness given by Erich Frome and regret that; uniqueness is rather a social stigma in today's world. But before

a world which is built on the worst and most ugly principle or theme (" If x has to win then y has to lose,) he can't hope that everyone will get the same privileges to live their lives, no matter how sophisticated, and how decent the world becomes in near or far future? And it is clear from the history of humankind.

that, shouldn't he understand that in

Philosophers and so many other people have tried to find a way, a way of serenity and tranquillity for the mankind. But what happened? Where's the Peace? Even none of the religions have been able to give the solution of the problem.

And whoever tries to solve the problem, if he tastes the success then in a concerned or in an unconcerned (and even unwilling) way, he takes the control. And as a result. some other 'he' is created in the society and this process goes on.

So, what remains for us rather than to become a stoic? Ashigul Islam Sudin