

MPs are poor performers in the House, TI-B report says

Let power of examples stir them up

THE report published by Transparency International-Bangladesh (TI-B) reviewing the performance of Bangladesh MPs comes not as a shock but endorsement of our fears that our parliament and its members have both failed to live up to the expectations of the people. Not that people expected much but the report has graphically stated that our MPs don't enjoy much credibility and they spend more time bickering rather than discussing matters of national importance. This makes for dismal reading.

But the most damaging aspect of the report says that many MPs are tainted by the smell of black money and this has seriously dented the credibility that is vital for ensuring a meaningful legislative process. The impact of having public representatives function while under the suspicion of having a less than clean and transparent economic history renders the legislative process less than effective.

Had such a review statement been one of individual cases there was a chance of being concerned without being alarmed. But we are facing a scenario where the system of election has produced certain obstacles in the path of representative democracy where for many money has become an integral part of being elected.

If one reflects on the performance of the MPs which too has been criticized, it will be noted that people do expect the MPs to speak on their behalf and raise both national and local issues. Unfortunately, it has become a debating club where members discuss more their own problems relating to political animosity than anything else and devote quite a good bit of time in praising their leaders. While the Opposition MPs have mostly stayed away from attending, thus displaying that they hold the august House at a much lower esteem than parliamentary democracy encourages, the overall performance of the members aren't going to make one believe that the future of democracy is in serious, committed hands.

Not all are in this groove but sadly many are and that is why the feeling is so intense that something radical needs to be done. One would have thought that if the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition were to take the Sangsad more seriously we could see a sea-change as the trickle down effect worked and reluctant MPs would become energized through the power of examples.

Till that date we may have to put up with dismal report cards of such nature and wait for better times.

Manpower export finds new destinations

A little effort shows how much can be done

THE ministry responsible for sending workers abroad deserves to be congratulated for having found places in Africa, the Middle East and Europe for Bangladeshi workers where people had not been sent before. This goes to show that even a minimum of effort yields results. While people were bemoaning the fact that manpower export was seeing its demise as a sector, Bangladesh has found employment opportunities in places like Botswana in Africa, Jordan in the Middle East and the Netherlands in the West. It's now clear that even as the market becomes more competitive, there are opportunities that can be explored successfully.

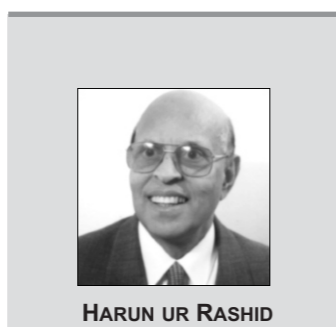
The government has in fact paid some quality attention to this sector recently and we have noted that the laws, rules and regulations and management as well are facing the prospects of streamlining. The declaration by the Ministry that the licences of existing companies may be cancelled if they fail to send the minimum is a good sign as it means that many companies will have to put in extra effort to survive in a global market full of competitors.

But manpower business is not simply a matter of a disciplined management of companies sending people abroad. It's also about the quality of people who are being sent abroad. Thus the focus, generally ignored till date, should also fall on skills improvement of those who are being sent.

The government has said that priority will be given to those who will have their own training units and this is a good policy. But one must also check the quality of people who are trying to go abroad and both regulation and supervision are needed in such cases. A more skilled person has better capacity of value addition and an integrated approach to training management and rational exporting management are critical if this sector should continue to bail out Bangladesh's limited economic opportunities.

It can be done as recent development shows. And it has to be done.

Visit of India's Foreign Minister: Bangladesh-India relations



HARUN UR RASHID

INDIA'S Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha is visiting Bangladesh for two days from today (August 24) at the invitation of Bangladesh Foreign Minister Morshed Khan. The purpose is believed to be discussing a wide-ranging bilateral, regional and global issues. The visit is most welcome.

It may be recalled that in June this year Foreign Minister Morshed Khan visited New Delhi and Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Choudhury had been in New Delhi in February of this year. Both the visits are believed to have been related to strengthening bilateral relations and co-operation. India's Principal Secretary Brajesh Mishra visited Dhaka in October last year soon after Begum Khaleda Zia became Prime Minister of the country. The exchange of visits demonstrates the importance both neighbouring countries attach to their relations and such visits need to be pursued at regular intervals.

The relations with neighbours, generally speaking, are complex and emotive in their contents. Neighbouring countries ordinarily are not free from bilateral disputes or irritants and a look at neighbouring

countries of the world will illustrate the reality. The ideal relations between neighbours appear to exist between the US and Canada or between France and Switzerland. Although disputes occasionally arise between them, they do not mar their friendly and co-operative relations.

As long as nation-states exist, their interests will differ and often asserted in bilateral or multilateral forums. There is nothing unfriendly

ble. Often perception of a situation from different angles may divide policy options for both nations. South Asia is a tension-filled region for many reasons which I shall not deal with here. They are well known.

There is one aspect that needs to be underscored. Disputes are perceived in a different light when a neighbour is bigger and endowed with more resources than the other. The perception of the people is important. Democratic governments

arrangement on land border of about 4025 km and the skirmishes should not occur if the border regulations are strictly followed. Furthermore while Bangladesh ratified the Agreement soon after it was concluded, India needs to ratify it; 6.5 km border has yet to be demarcated. The 1974 Agreement can only come into effect in terms of Article 5 of the Agreement when both parties exchange the instruments of ratification.

help in consolidating bilateral relations.

Third, is the issue of sea boundary in the Bay of Bengal and resolution of ownership of South Talpatty island. The uninhabited island is located about 4 km south of the confluence of Raimangal and Hariabhang rivers at the estuary in the western border. (Approximate latitude is 21 degrees, 36.0 "north and longitude 89 degrees 09.10" east). The island is believed to be

with regard to common rivers. There are common rivers on which diversion of water is already taking place upstream in India and such actions are injurious to Bangladesh. It is imperative that agreement on water sharing on common rivers, such as, Gumti, Khowai, Kushiara, Teesta, Feni and Muhuri is concluded to mutually acceptable sharing arrangements with fairness and justice.

The above are some of the pressing bilateral issues that need to be looked at with all the goodwill and seriousness. Nature has made Bangladesh and India to live next to each other and nothing can change this reality. Some say that the power and strength of a big neighbour is like a beauty. If you have it you don't need to go around saying it. One would argue that India, being the largest neighbour, has to take first the initiative in resolution of the issues. Given the spirit and desire to live together in harmony, there is no adequate reason why the issues cannot be resolved. After all the common goal of both countries is to eradicate poverty and meet the basic necessities of people.

The visit of India's Foreign Minister is important in bilateral relations and there is no substitute for being able to know at first hand the bilateral issues at a higher political level. We hope that the visit will be fruitful and bilateral relations between the two nations will grow from strength to strength to the mutual benefit of the peoples of both countries.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

BOTTOM LINE

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about it. It is the recognition of divergence of each other's interests that underpin the maturity of bilateral relations. The bedrock of good bilateral relations depends on trust, friendship and respect for each other. Friendship and trust can be maintained if all irritants are resolved at mutual satisfaction.

Both Bangladesh and India have developed an intricate maze of relations in economic, political, cultural and educational fields. The ties of history are so pervasive that relations between the peoples of the two nations exist independently of governments and policies.

The existing bilateral relations between the two nations may be termed as friendly and responsive to needs of each other as far as possi-

must carry the support of the people for the end product of an issue or dispute. Otherwise an agreement may not last long. Both countries require to make the same political, bureaucratic, intellectual, educational, cultural and media efforts towards resolution of bilateral disputes or irritants in good faith.

During the visit of India's Foreign Minister, I think it is appropriate to revisit some of the important pending issues between the two countries.

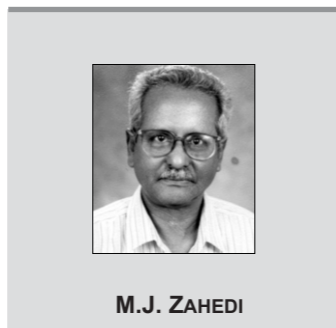
First, the land border issues. Hardly a week goes by without any untoward incident at the border, including pointless death of nationals at the hands of the security forces. The Land Boundary Agreement of 1974 is a comprehensive

Second, trade-deficit with India appears to become a major concern for Bangladesh. While India's exports to Bangladesh during 1996-97 were nearly US\$2 billion dollars, Bangladesh was able only to export its goods worth merely US\$ 47 million. This grotesque trade imbalance appears to have continued and suggests that something appears to be structurally wrong in the trade relationship and is not a temporary phenomenon. It seems that India-Bangladesh Joint Commission is not being operated in full gear. A concerted drive for the Commission to find ways of reducing the wide deficit appears to be imperative. The trade deficit may likely to fan that Bangladesh is being "dominated" by India and the negative image does not

approximately one square mile (640 acres) with general elevation of about 0.6 metre from the highest flood level. The resolution of ownership of the island is important. Furthermore delineation of sea boundary in the Bay of Bengal remains inconclusive. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea has provided guidelines in Articles 15, 74 and 83 and bilateral negotiations may be initiated to resolve the long-standing issue. It is believed that since 1982 no serious discussion took place on this matter.

Finally, sharing of waters of common rivers requires attention. The 1996 Ganges Water Treaty in its Article 9 stipulated that the two governments agreed to conclude water sharing treaties/ agreements

Political parties allege pre-election rigging!



M.J. ZAHEDI

THESE days the newspapers in Pakistan are full of stories and news of and about the forthcoming elections. Naturally so. President Pervez Musharraf is the only government that was not the result of civilians asking the Generals to intervene in the governance of the country. He only acted when he was removed from office, indeed with the backing of some Generals.

Civilians never asked General Ayub to overthrow the legal civilian government and repeal the 1956 constitution. Then, no one asked General Yahya Khan to take over from Ayub Khan. And no body prodded Gen Ziaul Huq to overthrow the government of Z.A. Bhutto. It is well known that an agreement had already been reached between the PPP government and the PNA team when Gen Zia struck on July 5, 1977. The Zia take over was surely pre-planned. Had it not been so, it is doubtful if he would (or could) have ruled for 11 years.

Even if it is accepted (for argument's sake at least) that the armed forces intervene only after coaxing by politicians, the question arises: how can a commander in chief remove an elected government in gross violation of the country's constitution and the solemn oath that the army chief has taken? One answer is that no army chief has ever been brought to the book and punished. The only case where a General was named was that of Yahya Khan (he was declared a usurper by a court ---- but that was after his death).

The tragic aspect of Pakistan's history is that elected civilian governments that followed these highly illegal acts which amounted to treason never thought of bringing any of them to book. A veteran journalist and a trade union leader,

in an article in daily 'The News', says it is a welcome development that President Musharraf has, during his recent visit to Bangladesh, expressed regrets over the excesses committed in former East Pakistan.

The writer then asks, how long President Musharraf proposes to be the COAS in addition to being the President of the country? The likelihood is that he may not take off his uniform until October 2007 when his term of office expires. 'He would continue to hold the post of the army chief as long as possible, certainly for reasons he describes as stabilizing the reforms aimed at establishing true and sustainable democracy'. The writer then asks, can there be a constitutional bar to the extension in the service of an army chief? In India, for example, no one is allowed to remain as a service chief beyond his normal three-year term (only in rare cases a service chief is granted extension and that too for one year). A civilian or military official cannot also hold public office unless he resigns and unless there is a two-year gap between his resignation and his assumption of a public office.

SEVENTY-ONE political parties will be allowed to contest the next elections in Pakistan, the Election Commission has declared these parties eligible to contest the forthcoming elections on October 10. The Commission has disqualified 58 parties from contesting the elections. These include Pakistan Muslim League (Zia), formed by former President Ziaul Huq's son Ijazul Huq. (He has of course contested the decision in the High Court). Those disqualified have been said to have deviated from the prescribed procedures to carry out intra-party elections and for not providing prerequisite details pertaining to their organizational structure. According to the commission, it has been done because Ijazul Huq, till August 4, 2002, was a member of the PML(Q). 'It is therefore incon-

ceivable that his party could have come into existence and its election held on 3rd August, 2002.

Under the new law, the political parties are required to provide a copy of the constitution of their party to the Election Commission. This should inter alia include aims and objectives of the party, its organizational structure at the federal, provincial and local levels, criteria of membership of the party, membership fee to be paid in addition to qualifications, tenure of party leaders and office-bearers, criteria for receipt and collection of funds for the party, etc.

Naturally, the political parties as well as the relevant government departments are these days busy in pre-election activities. As is only natural, the former have been leveling some pre-election rigging by the latter. They allege of involvement of the government in pre-election rigging of different sorts. The government's biggest problem is a free press. So much is printed now-a-days that would have been unthinkable not too long ago. This of course goes to the credit of the President, General Musharraf, but the difficulty for him is that there are no secrets any more.

Some, with some backing from the government, have cobbled together an alliance between all pro-government parties. The Grand National Alliance is the king's party and everything is being done to smooth its way into power. Some people do not of course approve of these because the army is a national institution that is above politics. Imran Khan has of course refused to join this cobbled alliance. Some say that he is not a good politician and may suffer for it. But this has enhanced his stature and would benefit him in the long run.

Published reports are giving a

fair picture of what is being done, both at the central and the provincial levels. Most of the 'nazims (public leaders at the district level) will play ball anyway but it is the district level bureaucracy, people fear, which will be told to cooperate. In the villages and small towns this could become a crucial factor in favour of the King's party. This help no doubt will facilitate the task of the Grand National Alliance. But this does not mean that on election day voters would go into the booth and stamp in favour of its candidates.

General Musharraf may in the end get a pliant parliament but it will create an unstable democracy. The opposition parties would not accept the verdict and people would also be skeptical. What Pakistan needs today is a stable political order. It is not too late to change the course and let the political parties fight a free and fair election.

M J Zahedi is an eminent columnist in Pakistan and formerly the Editor of the Khaiteez Times.

LETTER FROM KARACHI

General Musharraf may in the end get a pliant parliament but it will create an unstable democracy. The opposition parties would not accept the verdict and people would also be skeptical. What Pakistan needs today is a stable political order. It is not too late to change the course and let the political parties fight a free and fair election.

OPINION

How fit are we for democracy?

WASEEM ALIM

WE have won the status of being the most corrupt country in the world and a minister claims that the studies are wrong or rather we are not as corrupt as they say. Well, even if it is wrong we will still be among the first five. Does it make any difference if the studies are wrong? In our country the corruption is all pervading at all levels. Try getting a driving license without greasing them! You cannot beat them even if you are a world-class driver.

The banking system is also replete with such examples. A defaulter of crores can get scot-free and participate in election, and the grill is meant only for minor defaulters who are more victims of banking system than of their own volley. And if you belong to the ruling elite it is roses all the way. Be it the question of fresh loan, waiver of interest, rescheduling and what not, all you have to do is ask for it.

Every five years a Bangladeshi gets the chance to choose the bullet by which he is likely to be shot in the

next five years. The government may change but the life of commoner remains the same. Each time he casts his vote with hopes and is awarded by disappointment. That remains the way. The new government claims that the murders per week are lower than the past government. Are they trying to balance off the accounts?

Moreover why do we have elections? Why not change the government from democracy to monarchy when people seem to think that all their family members are born leaders? They seem to think that the country is their family property that is to be passed onto the next generation. An ordinary person stands no chance because he is not a relation of these families, nor does he have the wealth or the power to be a new comer.

The present government with a majority of 2/3 of the parliament they do have many mouths to fill, many obligations to fulfill. It is no doubt that crime and corruption will rise, ecological balance will be destroyed, coastal land will be grabbed. They have invested in the election and it is

their right! Altering history, changing portraits and flag-rules every five year makes no difference for us. It may give the prime ministers some pleasure by seeing a portrait of their late family member hanging on the walls of government offices and by hurting the feelings of the opposition leaders, but it is really a waste of resources. There is not an icon of feeling for such niceties (!) in the minds of common people. Does it?

Then our main opposition party, who had been so shocked by the defeat that they seem to have taken shelter in their shell. Boycotting the parliament, wow! What a standard of our politicians! Why have we voted for their MPs? I am sure it was not for just seeing their faces. It does not matter whether they go there or not because they are so insignificant in number. Is this the logic? Don't they have any duty to the nation or is it only the question of 'me first'?

But why are we blaming the politicians. There is not a single soul who raises a considerable voice of protest. Mute majority! Smart young people go out to those developed

countries to make them more developed leaving their home country in hands of these opportunists. Educated people in the community can only criticize but words cannot replace actions.

Indeed we are incapable of democracy. Democracy is not our cup of tea!

The people who died in 1971 with the dream of 'Sonar Bangla' certainly did not dream of the current situation. Even after 31 years of liberation we are not actually liberated from the injustices in our society.

As for the future, with our growing population, lack of job, global warming, lack of communication skill of average Bangladeshi, lack of proper leaders, rising crime and corruption rates and so on, we do seem to have a very dark one.

I know very well that this piece of writing is certainly not going to change anything but it has certainly relieved me as I share my disappointment with others through this.

Waseem Alim is a student of Bangladesh International Tutorial.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

"Great Army"

For the last few days, I am reading countless letters regarding "Great Army". I don't know why so many of the writers have criticised army despite the fact they are still less corrupt, well disciplined and doing their jobs with sincerity both at home and abroad.

I don't think that we should blame army because of the cantonment being in the city centre on the pretext that it is creating traffic jam and congestion for the city dwellers. I would rather blame the people who are coming from rural areas to settle in Dhaka and thereby expanding the city, creating pollution and all kinds of traffic congestion.

There should be some kind of restrictions in buying and selling lands to the people who are coming from outside the city. Meanwhile regarding MIG 29, I would say it is better to have one such plane rather than 10 obsolete F7/F8.

A Citizen
Dhaka

Naureen Khan (August 22) has made an excellent point today. She says that the army indulges itself in privileges on the excuse of defending our country. She also says that the army, the bureaucracy and the tycoons are all the same. She's more right than she imagines. About half the tycoons are retired generals and colonels anyway and a great many of not most of the senior posts in the bureaucracy are held by generals as well.

One writer comically said that generals do not voluntarily take up ambassadorships. Is that a joke? The lobbying for MP nominations, ambassadorships and Directorships of public institutes and corporations start years before their retirement.

Junior Foreign Service officials on their foreign postings live in

horrible apartments and often have to have second jobs just to survive... Do you think a government that pays its Secretaries such miserable salaries pays junior Foreign Service officers posted in countries like Japan and the US a living wage?

Retired or serving military officers have no right to run public corporations. That right for better or for worse is the career civil servants.

Azad
Dhaka

One of the things I have found in the letters page of *The Daily Star* is that there are some really interesting people out there with an amazing trove of knowledge. One of the frequent contributors I would rank high on that list would be ES in Missouri. I almost never agree with anything he ever writes and vice versa.

Well I have a request for him. I would like to know how do the

salaries and amenities given to army officers' tally against that of police officers of similar ranks. I would really like to know.

I am also curious to see how ES defends that discrepancy.
TAI
Dhaka

"English medium students in trouble"

It's so sad to see that the teachers of English medium schools and even the loved parents of English medium schools don't like what they are teaching and what their children are being taught. Then why send a child to an English medium school anyway? So that someone like you all can point fingers at them tomorrow like you all did to us?

When a person points their finger at someone, the rest of the 3 fingers points back at themselves. Instead of saying what we have learnt, why don't you all ask yourselves what

you could have done to help us, the students, and suggest the teachers what they could have done. When you send your kids to English Medium school, you make a choice of your child's strength either in Bangla or in English. While the Bengali Medium students will say that "The teacher took a test today", the English Medium students will say that, "The teacher gave a test today." We can not blame the students for the lack of knowledge, it's the teachers who sow the seeds.

I would like to add that the English Medium teachers know how to set their priorities right, and till now not a single student complained against them. I would like to ask the parents to be supportive of the quality education that "the so-called famous schools" give and give extra care at home if they think their kids need more. Without English Medium schools a lot of us would be stuck with

"session jot", "hartal", "dirty politics", or even die in cross fires! Please parents and teachers try to make things better and not give the English Medium students a tough time, because we are your children after all.

Nafisa
University of Texas, USA

Rob the bank

In American 'wild wild west' movies, the gun-totting men on horseback are seen robbing the banks, the easiest way to get rich. In a similar fashion, Agarwals in connivance with our bank officials rob the bank and leave the depositors helpless & penniless. What a nice way to get rich, for some people!

Khondker Habib Rabbani
Shantinagar, Dhaka

Hiala High School

I would like to draw the kind attention of the Additional

Secretary, of the Education Ministry, that the Hiala High School is the lone High School in the *bhati* areas of Habigonj district.

There is no high school in and around five unions under Baniachong Thana of Habigonj. The residents of the locality had set up the school from our own initiative five years ago and the government was kind enough to enlist in MPOs the year 2000. Now there is satisfactory number of students including girl students coming from remote areas.

But there is no school building and enough classrooms. It is therefore earnestly requested to kindly grant necessary funds for the construction of school buildings and help the students continuing their studies. We have the land and enough space for the development of the School.

Syed Rofiqul Hussain
Hiala Shaheb Bari

Pathetic condition of a road

Shah Kabir Road connecting the vastly populated areas of Azampur and Moimartek spans over 6 kms. More than 50,000 people use this road everyday. But the condition of the road is very poor-- full of potholes created by the monsoon rain. All kinds of vehicles ply the road and very often some of them overturn or skid off due to potholes at the peril to some and causing great sufferings to others. The regular phenomenon of the commuters' sufferings is beyond description. Traffic tangles continuing for hours are even more horrible when a vehicle gets ditched.

We urge the authorities concerned to come forward and take necessary steps towards mitigating the misery of the people.

Saghir Ahmed
Azampur, Dhaka