

Poor governance: There must be will to overcome problems

MONIRUL I KHAN

HERE is perhaps strong instinct in us to keep on hoping for a good future. Such instinct is not untracked in literature. Just recall what Freud said about life's instinct. It gives us impulse and drive that move us forward and wheel the locomotive of hope for future. We the people of Bangladesh do not cease to see hope. As we are doing it now. Certainly all of us are not the same. There were a few and at present perhaps many who do not find reason to see hope. At one point they left the country and that phenomenon came to be known as brain drain. Although the advocate of globalisation would not see it as a negative evidence because brain drain in their opinion is the effect of global interconnection. It is argued that an individual will always look for a better alternative. In this process, what is wrong if he chooses a better place for job and living? However you can also interpret the concept of globalisation narrowly focused on economics ignoring other human perspectives! Our objective is not to sound ultra-nationalist! This is an ideology that hardly bear any relevance at present.

Patriotism is a moment in a history. It is not an event that will always emerge. At particular juncture of history it does so when the pre-condition is present. Just look at our own history. Millions of people rose up to fight a brilliant war of independence. Again the same nation also witnessed the events just opposite to patriotism. There is scope to re-formulate these notions in the light of the new reality.

We began by saying that we haven't lost our hope to see a good future. Despite the fact we are passing through a painful time — every now and then killing, mugging, snatching and what not. The notion of security to life is now completely absent. A state system plunged in a total confusion! Imagine this is taking place against the background when an alliance won more than three-fourth of the parliamentary seats! Also imagine it is happening despite people's tremendous hope with the ruling coalition. Does it mean that there is no relationship between good governance and massive popular support? Perhaps this is true. Performance of a government may not depend on her popularity, in Bangladesh. If this government finally fails to deliver the expected results perhaps a new theory will emerge suggesting the missing link between popularity and good governance. Bangladesh history presents such evidence time and again. I would like to draw

attention to the government and its performance immediately after the independence. With tremendous popularity the post-independence government began its turn and the equal amount of poor performances demonstrated. Is there anything wrong with regard to expressing our support to a party or person? Does it often cross the normal proportion? Again the issue of seeing hope arises. We are so much eager to keep on seeing hope that we pour our total support. It may also be a part of the tradition of our society. This is a type of society where the charisma rules over reason. In other words we are the people who are inclined to respond to the set of rationality driven by emotions. We judge people on a different set of

move in upward direction. Situation with regard to aggregate employment is yet to demonstrate significant change, which in turn implies poor investment scenario. Tight fiscal and monetary measures have added pressures both to the savings and consumption standards of the people. Unless other macro-economic indicators function well very soon tight fiscal and monetary measures may start backsliding.

How to overcome the problem?

Certainly the issue of governance is a complex and a broad issue. It involves the application of theory to a particular context. Any society has got its own political history, which significantly influences its political process. There are many political

gain. A political party can achieve this goal of good governance when it has got the commitment to change the country and the condition of the people. Normally there is a need for ideology to build a strong commitment by a political party. In the course of implementing an ideology a political party automatically subjects itself to a set of commitment. The strong side of the ideology per se lies in the fact that it can override the inclination for wealth. Therefore there is a big difference between a party with a strong adherence to ideology and without it. We can easily imagine that how much sacrifice it would require to lift the country like Bangladesh out of poverty, underdevelopment, inequality and chaos.

by the conflict among different factions and if one faction reduces the importance of another faction. The ruling party has to consider this point and find out if there is any factional divide in the party. There is an old rumour that there are rightist and leftist factions in the ruling party. It is also said that one of the factions is up to reducing the importance of the other. There is also attempt to change the ideological standpoint of the party. Certainly intra-fighting will seriously affect the quality of performance of the political party. Senior leaders need to deal with the issue, sending message to the feuding sides that they (the party) won't tolerate it any more.

Establishment of chain of command: There must be a clear

police did not hesitate to take the advantage of political interference. If the government is really serious to break the police-criminal nexus then stopping the political interference is the first task. Political interference will also mean providing shelter to the criminals. It is now clear that carrying out effective police action against the criminals and simultaneously providing them shelter cannot go together. Most of the big crimes have got some kind of political connection therefore the politics have to be insulated from police.

How can it be done? A task force may be constituted only to look after the matter that there is no political interference in the function of police. The task force should operate under the direct supervision of the chief executive of the government. In addition, innovative ways to nab the criminal have to be devised. All thanas should concentrate nabbing the extortionists and killers at the mahalla level, irrespective of political affiliation, if any. Already such mechanism is in place, there is need to gear it up for effective functioning. No more leap service and rhetoric.

Time bound programme and regular review of progress: Immediately a few sectors may be prioritised to pave the way for development. It may include both economic and non-economic sectors. For example, freeing three municipal wards of extortion in one month may be a priority programme. Or recovering certain amount of bad loan in a specific time period can be another. Such programmes will be focused and reviewed everyday. This approach would not be new since 100 days programme was undertaken at the very beginning. At present, economy and law and order should be given attention while formulating other programmes under time bound approach.

Upholding the spirit of democratic pluralism: No opportunity should be spared to uphold the norm of democratic pluralism. Taking revenge should be stopped right now. There are many examples where it was found that a ruling party gained more by not taking revenge on the opposition. It is not possible at all to have democracy without opposition. The rule of the game will be the national interest. People of this country are matured enough to distinguish between right and wrong. Imposition of ideology or any programme will be a mistake. To build a modern society there is no alternative to democratic pluralism at all levels. Allow the people to decide their best.

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parameters. Perhaps our heart moves ahead of our head!

Features of poor governance

How to elaborate on the notion of poor governance we are referring to? Certainly the first parameter would be the issue of law and order situation. It is not only the first parameter but the most crucial too. It does not refer to only lack of individual security. In the words of no lesser a person than the finance minister or the World Bank country director, the law and order situation is a crucial factor in determining the mood of the investors towards investment. Thus it is not only the issue of security of life, asset and other things. Only the other day a research result pointed out that the organised crime is one of the important impediments to the economic investment.

In addition to the poor law and order situation there are other manifestations what we mean by poor governance. It includes the lack of discipline, violation of rules and laws, slow economic change etc. Cities are poorly managed, crowded, polluted, with poor infrastructure, lack of civic amenities etc. Rural poverty has reached an alarming level.

Economy is also an important indicator in the context of governance. One has to consider separately the macro and micro indicators. The rate of inflation is an important issue in the context of macro-economic indicators. It is tending to

features that are unique to Bangladesh. Such as the country has been liberated through a bloody struggle, its democratic process has been interrupted several times by the military rule, the two major political parties are harbouring some differences extremely difficult to bridge up, poverty is endemic, corruption is widespread etc. The above unique features will come into the way of governance time and again whatever the model is chosen. Despite the apparent difficulty we would make a modest attempt to address some selected issues with the hope that they will sufficiently reflect on the present crisis of governance.

Strengthening commitment: In terms of meaning commitment implies the urge to reach a goal ignoring/overcoming the obstacles. It is taking up challenge when the goal is a difficult one. It also implies doing something very hard when the hope for material gain out of doing a work is minimum.

Political power is lucrative because of its control over business, resource allocation and mobilisation, and so many other things. Power is a ticket to resource and wealth. In the exercise of power complete compliance with the legal framework is something that is essential for good governance. One of the important threat to good governance is the abuse of power for economic gain. At present Bangladesh hardly can afford such a feat that the execution of political power will be directed to economic

For the present ruling party the most important challenge is how competently it can engage the rank and file to accept this imperative. The political parties in our country often assemble those who are rent seekers. A person with a rent seeking motive will not be able to accept such ideology that he would win an election, serve the people and would not use the political power for financial benefit. It is possible to a large extent if the front ranking leaders practice this ideology of rendering service without seeking rent out of it. Exemplar of any sort produces the effect of replication. In simple words it would mean if a senior leader keeps on providing leadership and services and refrains from deriving financial or other benefit out of it, then the junior leaders and the general workers would be inspired to follow the example.

While the ruling party has to ground on solid commitment, the civil society needs to demonstrate their commitment to serve the nation. If our civil society take a partisan line ignoring the national interest it will mislead the people. The ruling party will also get the opportunity to ignore civil society accusing their partisanship.

Ruling party's cohesiveness: Factional divide weakens the function of a political party. It will affect the interest of the party and the nation if each faction seeks to pursue its own interest. The capacity of a party gets seriously affected

chain of command in the party in power. The locus of power should be centred in a single point. The presence of several locus of power will invite severe problems and one such would be the lack of accountability. When the locus of power is transparent the responsibility is defined, the consequence of the exercise of power is owned. Ambiguous and non-transparent locus of power will tend to committing mistake and eventually lead to seeking benefit. Decision making process of a party gets seriously affected and its rank and file suffer from indecisiveness. Corrupt practices will be encouraged to be flourished taking the benefit of non-transparent locus of power. For a political party democratically elected it is a setback to suffer from such syndrome. About the main ruling party there is rumour about the presence of a number of locus of power. If such speculation is true certainly price is already paid for that. Rent seekers are generally skilled to exploit the presence of non-transparent locus of power.

Stopping interference in the function of police: Since the law and order situation is the main issue with regard to the poor governance the political interference in the functioning of police is a serious type of misdeed. We all know how do the political parties try to interfere with the function of the police when they are on dock. Already the moral quality of the police department has been seriously questioned. It has been found in the past that the

Remembering Raymond Bhai

A 'different' teacher and a visionary of NGO movement in Bangladesh

JULIAN FRANCIS

ROTHER Raymond Cournoyer, or Raymond Bhai, as he is remembered by the many in Bangladesh and elsewhere who have known him, some for 30 to 40 years, died at the age of 70, just more than a week ago in Montreal Canada, after a short illness.

Raymond first came to what was then East Pakistan in 1958. In the course of his teaching at St. Placid's, he took great interest in the culture and the music of the country and having mastered the language very well, came to love the country and its people. Raymond instilled a sense of self-belief into the hearts and minds of many of his students at St. Placid's, so that they often far exceeded their own expectations. He was also deeply affected by the poverty he saw and at times felt quite helpless to do anything about it. He could, however, identify with it.

The youngest of a rural Quebec family of four brothers and two sisters (2 other children died at birth), Raymond grew up in considerable poverty in the 1930s. He remembered his two sisters at 12 and 14 being sent away to be maids to help the family income and lessen the expenses. This memory stayed with him to such an extent that he did not feel at all comfortable to have a domestic servant in Bangladesh. He once wrote,

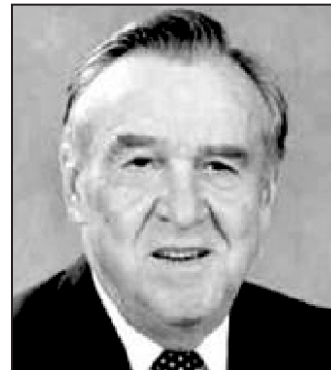
"I had experienced that great tensions can build up in a harmonious family when material growth is not accompanied by a greater ability to handle new situations as they arise.

"I carried with me, as well, the deep experience that poverty does not bar anybody from enjoying an enriching atmosphere of frugality and that pains d'argent ne durent qu'un temps (money-related problems do not last forever) as my mother would often say. This helped me greatly not to get emotionally involved in front of poverty situations. Too many so-called do-gooders, as somebody now wishes to call the do-gooders, walk around villages in developing countries with their hearts in a sling."

Into the world of NGOs

After returning to Canada in 1965, he was Executive Director of Oxfam-Quebec and then in early 1971 came to India as Oxfam's representative for Eastern India and East Pakistan. Within a few weeks of his arrival, the Liberation War got under way and streams of refugees started entering India. Raymond warned Oxfam that up to 10 million refugees could come to India, a figure the Oxfam management in Oxford laughed at. A few of us had been working on what was, at that time, Oxfam's single largest ever rural development project in Bihar. Raymond lost no time in asking us to come to Calcutta and set up the administration of a relief operation that eventually, at that time, became the largest relief operation with which Oxfam had ever been involved. Raymond soon showed that he was 'different'.

While other agencies were flying in expatriate teams to run their programmes, Raymond, with my strong support, was quite sure that all the trained manpower we needed was available in India as well as in the refugee camps themselves. Oxfam ended up having a huge programme involving doctors from Calcutta and Bombay medical colleges and hundreds of volunteers from various Gandhian organizations. About 500,000 people were assisted in various refugee camps. And when Raymond was away attending to other Oxfam work and publicizing the relief work of Oxfam in Europe, Canada and U.S.A., I was setting up my office in a hotel in Calcutta. One by one, young ex-students of Raymond, in India as refugees, had heard about



Raymond's whereabouts and came to search him out. I ended up with a dynamic and dedicated staff drawn mostly from ex-students of St. Placid's.

To Bangladesh

By December 1971, it was clear that the emergence of an independent Bangladesh was merely a matter of time, so Raymond was the obvious choice as Oxfam's first 'Field Director' in Bangladesh. However, it was not so simple. He told Oxfam in U.K. that he wanted 'carte blanche' regarding the development activities to be supported in Bangladesh and that he did not want to have any part in distributing relief supplies. "Give them to CARITAS or Mother Teresa!" he thundered, "I want to invest for the long-term in young Bangladeshis with vision." Oxfam, Oxford seemed to Raymond to be a bit stuffy and colonial in those days and he had many a tussle with Oxfam's senior management.

And so, as we wound up our operations in the refugee camps, the relief supplies were given away, cash was provided to CARE for a massive housing programme and more funds were allocated for the purchase of new ferries and repair of old ones. It was a measure of his great love of the fabric and culture of Bangladesh, that Raymond insisted that the new ferries not be named after famous Bangladeshis or martyrs but be named after Bangladesh flowers.

With major funds having been allocated, Raymond was able to get on with what he saw as his 'mission', to support new and emerging NGOs. His strong belief in their aspirations is how Oxfam became BRAC's very first donor and Oxfam supported Gonoshasthaya Kendra in those early days too. He was a man not only of vision but also ideas and dreams. Raymond nurtured the formation of Bangladesh Development Service Centre (BDSC), which is still going today, and later on when he came again to Bangladesh with CUSO, his vision and faith in people again shone through when he was the guiding spirit behind the establishment of PROSHIKA which was literally born in his office and house. Banche Shekha is another organization that 'grew' out of CUSO too and Raymond was also closely associated with Gono Unnayan Procheta.

Later in the 1970s, Raymond became CUSO's Director for Asia and linked like-minded 'participatory' organizations in Asia together and later on as a CIDA consultant pursued his dream of an Asian University.

After returning to Canada in the 1980s he tried his hand at politics and stood for election with Parti Quebecois.

It is true that he has not always been entirely happy about how NGOs as a whole have developed in Bangladesh — he worried about NGOs becoming big — and of the role of donors, but he always retained his great faith in the people he knew and loved. And to know them as well as he did, he immersed himself in their culture, their music and their food! He planted seeds of his ideas and these have flourished and grown and he will be remembered for a long time to come.

The story of Singapore: Israel turned the wrong page

M. SHAFIULLAH

SOME countries are born independent. Some achieve independence. Singapore had independence thrust upon it. Some 45 British colonies had held colourful ceremonies to formalize and celebrate the transfer of sovereign power from imperial Britain to their indigenous governments. For Singapore 9 August 1965 was no ceremonial occasion. We had never sought independence. In referendum less than three years ago, we had persuaded 70 per cent of the electorate to vote in favour of merger with Malaya." This is how

Singapore did not want to become as Israel in South East Asia to be alone and odd man out, a Chinese entity in the midst of a Malay archipelago of about a hundred million people. "Singapore did not show 'China card' to her antagonistic neighbours instead worked tenaciously to win the acceptance of the other South East Asian states. She was successful in providing much needed security to her people as well as building a modern viable state with impressive human rights record. This was and still remains to be the most instructive lesson for Israel to learn from 'The Story of Singapore'.

"Story of Singapore" begins under chapter 'suddenly, independence'. The architect of modern Singapore Lee Kuan Yew in his memoir recounted "seventy five per cent of

our population of two million were Chinese, a tiny minority in an archipelago of 30,000 islands inhabited by more than 100 million Malay or Indonesian Muslims. We were a Chinese island in a Malay sea. How could we survive in such a hostile environment?"

Singapore is a small island of 214 square miles at low tide. The port-city had thrived because it had the resourceful Malay hinterland and was the heart of British Empire in South East Asia. But the colonial power was about to leave. Despite the presence of 63,000 British servicemen, two aircraft carriers, 80 warships and 20 squadrons of aircraft in Southeast Asia to defend the newly formed Malaysia Federation, it could not prevail against the forces of communism. The Malay leaders including Tunku Abdur Rahman feared that if ever they shared real political power with the non-Malays, they would be overwhelmed. The combined Chinese population of Malay and Singapore would form majority in the parliament. In his memoir Lee Kuan Yew identified "That was the crux of the matter" of the 'sudden independence'.

A resourceless tiny landmass Singapore's greatest asset is her population. They are also her main security threat. About 80 per cent of her population is Chinese and these overseas Chinese are the objects of jealousy, hatred and attack all over South East Asia. It was because of her overwhelming Chinese population that Singapore was refused first shelter she sought for security under the Malaysian Federation. In the perception of Non-Alignment Movement leader firebrand Sukarno, the creation of Malaysia was a "New-colonialist" Federation and met with his "konfrontasi". The Chinese in Malay and Singapore were aware that Indonesia was against even its own three million ethnic Chinese population. At independence Lee Kuan Yew asked himself, "What did

the future hold for Singapore?" Lee spent the next four years to finding answer to this difficult question.

Lee did not agree with the communists in Singapore who took inspiration from China; they could not succeed in Singapore and Malaya because, in his view "their brand of communism was not indigenous. Maoism would not succeed in Southeast Asia." The founder of Singapore therefore, repeatedly warned his people, "If you want a Chinese chauvinistic or communist society, failure is assured. Singapore will surely be isolated. But even if you are not isolated and you extend your chauvinistic influence to your neighbour [Malaysia], they will, if they find no way out, join up with another big neighbour [Indonesia] to deal with you." The far-sighted Lee Kuan Yew kept a tight lid on what he called 'majority exhibitionism' and in combination of persuasion and tough measures built a multi-racial society in Singapore out of a 'polyglot' collection of migrants from China, India, Malaysia, Indonesia and several other parts of Asia.

A fourth-generation migrant from Guangdong province of China, Lee Kuan Yew consciously prevented Singapore from being seen as an 'out-post' of Chinese dominance in South East Asia. He argued that the security of his small state lies in Thai border and not in far off China. His linking of Singapore's security with bordering Malaysia through the Five Powers Defence Agreement in November 1971, and his steady refusal to accord diplomatic recognition to China ahead of Indonesia and Malaysia, all helped to establish credibility of Singapore as a genuine member-state among South East Asia's predominantly non-Chinese states. It is this perception of the South East Asian people that facilitated integration of Singapore in the ASEAN community. Secured and settled in her own natural habitat with good governance and highest per capita income of any nation in

South East Asia, Singapore is influential in the affairs of the Association of the South East Asian Nations. In domestic as in international politics, the country's dominant voice for three decades after independence was that of its first prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew.

With Jewish population of 5.2 million, mostly immigrants drawn from five continents, GDP of \$112 billion [2000], per capita income of \$17,700 and land area of 7,850 square miles transplanted in the sea of 22 Arab countries, Israel often tends commentators to compare between it and Singapore in their success to nation building mechanisms.

In April 1962 Lee Kuan Yew visited Nehru, Nasser and Tito to explain what Singapore stood for as well as to neutralize Sukarno, their comrade-in-arm in NAM. Lee told Nasser, the then most powerful Arab leader in simple term, "Singapore did not want to become as Israel in South East Asia to be alone and odd man out, a Chinese entity in the midst of a Malay archipelago of about a hundred million people. "Singapore did not show 'China card' to her antagonistic neighbours instead worked tenaciously to win the acceptance of the other South East Asian states. She was successful in providing much needed security to her people as well as building a modern viable state with impressive human rights record. This was and still remains to be the most instructive lesson for Israel to learn from 'The Story of Singapore'.

Israel did not draw her constitution ever since she declared her independence on 14 May 1948 just to avoid limiting her final territory and to settle to a fixed boundary. The West Bank, Gaza and the Syrian Golan Heights are under her military occupation ostensibly for security reasons. The United States alone provides approximately \$ 2 billion per year in security assis-

tance to Israel. A non-declared nuclear weapon state having further weapons of mass destruction, besides possessing state-of-the-art military machines, Israelis suffer from perennial insecurity for their leaders' lack of vision of Lee Kuan Yew. Not that the politicians and the military commanders do not read history but most of them do not dare to come to term with reality when called upon to implement the lessons of history to their own unique situation. Short-sighted and cowardice leaderships bring misery to their own people as well as tragedy to other nationalities.

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