

Governance -- the prime concern

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

DICHOTOMOUS political contrast prevailing in Bangladesh today is increasingly contributing to a sharp polarization among the people, not so much based on ideological persuasion but on one's attempts to regain lost power and the other's equal determination to frustrate all attempts of this quest. In this conflictual situation the welfare of the people, in whose name all the battles are being fought gets little, if at all, attention. Indeed, albeit reluctantly, one is tempted to agree with the skeptical view that politics is the conduct of public affairs for private advantages. Politics is normal and natural in modern society because humans are social beings and their interactions both within and without the boundaries of a defined geographical area have to be regulated by certain rules. Politicians may be itinerant and eclectic in their views but they are crystal clear in their understanding that "real politics are the possession and distribution of power" (Benjamin Disraeli). Their real indifference to public misery has plateaued to such an extent that no degree of opprobrium would affect their conduct and conscience. In his article Omar Khasru (Politics of Being and Nothingness-DS-August 28th) drawing on Jean Paul Satre's theory has aptly described the politicians of the day as constantly falling into "bad faith"; evading responsibility for their (mis)deeds; and thus creating a breach between promises and performance.

Ethics apparently has taken a holiday these days. Senseless murders, mindless violence, countless assassination of moral values with society playing the role of a silent chronicler bear sad testimony to the unethical dorsal column of societal character. Why must dissenting voices be muted -- be they electronic or human? After all democratic pluralism is enshrined in our constitution. Human Development Report 2002 analyzing governance crisis has identified, inter-alia, widespread corruption as one of the indicators. For the second successive year Bangladesh has been

ranked as the most corrupt country in Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2002 by the Berlin-based Transparency International. TI has defined corruption as "the abuse of public office for private gain". To be fair TI revealed that developed countries assisted the spread of corruption in developing countries. Its Bribery Payers Index (BPI) 2002 stated that firms from Russia, China, Taiwan and South Korea closely followed by Italy, Hongkong, Malaysia, Japan, USA and France figured prominently despite the fact that many of these countries were signatories to Anti-Bribery Convention (DS-August 29th).

The Human Development Report has defined the goals of good governance as respect for

less elite imposing their will and whims and trampling upon the dignity of the people with careless abandon. Human development in the words of Aung San Suu Kyi "demands constant effort and capacity for rethinking, flexibility and fast reactions. Hopeless, helpless people stripped of their dignity are hardly capable of such activities. And so we return to the link between human development and human dignity" (page 52 HDR 2002). One consoling part of the Report is that GDP per capita for Bangladesh calculated under purchasing power parity scheme at US\$1602 is more than that of Nepal and Bhutan and close to that of Pakistan. As is well known Purchasing Power Parity Theory (put forward by Cassel

police, politicians and law; development and increased efficiency of infra-structure and utilities; distribution of business ownership from few hands to many as some of the measures necessary to improve our global competitiveness.

Perhaps donors' perception of lack of good governance and slow implementation of reforms have significantly reduced inflow of foreign aid. Consequently Bangladesh had to take the high moral ground; first by stating that we would like to opt out of LDC club (thus forfeiting various advantages the country has been entitled to get as an LDC), and then proclaiming the necessity to rely on internal resources. Net result has been increasing taxes -- both direct and

explain away the Spartan life being led by the political leaders just across the border as opposed to the opulent life style (by Bangladesh standard) of our leaders.

In this cash scarce situation privatization of state owned enterprises (SOE) has once again become the favourite slogan of the government to get out of the economic difficulties. In the implementation of this process, perhaps, not much attention has been given to the social costs while divesting the SOEs. Undeniably successive governments cannot go on financing loss incurring enterprises ad infinitum. It is therefore logical that such enterprises should be privatized. Prof. Rehman Sobhan (Privatization in Bangladesh: An Agenda in

about US\$5 billion which our private sector cannot afford or alternatively give away in the post-MFA era the RMG sector to India and China who already preside over large integrated textile industry.

While management of the economy remains an integral part of good governance, such governance also embraces socio-political aspects (page 51 HDR 2002). If one were to posit that the West has reached the apotheosis of democratic values and the USA has become the hegemon (now being doubted over its wisdom of Iraq policy); then external dosage of conditionality would have to be interpolated in the governance policy of the "lesser" states. As Ziauddin Sardar has argued colonization known as "westernization" and now going under the name of "globalization" is transforming the world into the proverbial "global villages", rapidly shrinking distances, compressing space and time, and shaping the world in the image of a single culture and civilization. Further on the intensification of globalization would usher in the era of post-modernism and post-developmentalism in which a "small minority of regions would control the vast majority of material resources and technologies. In doing so they would not only reproduce uneven development, they also would compel underdeveloped regions to participate in a system that prioritizes commercialistic exchange-value consideration over popular wee-being" (Dennis O'Hearn --Tigers and Multi-national Corporations). In such a global scenario it would, perhaps, be advisable for our leaders to gain deep insight into the world of tomorrow and our place in that matrix, instead of extending their tunnel vision into the next elections. If Iraq and Afghanistan are anything to go by (as examples of nation-states and not for their delinquency) then politico-economic regionalism would better serve our interests in the long run regardless of the people wielding power in Bangladesh.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a retired Secretary to the Bangladesh government and former ambassador.

JS concludes in a chaos

Nation pays MPs dearly only to hear mutual acrimony

WE spend nearly taka three hundred crore to hold elections. Then we pay our MPs salary, allowances (including money for telephone bills that many never pay), tax-free cars (the quota per head may be increased from one to two, without any protest from either side of the House). We are now contemplating giving them offices with two staff members in their respective constituencies. In exchange what do our MPs give us? The least said the better. The minimum we expect is a reflection of public concerns in their speeches. What did we get in the last four days? Simply self-praise, and opponent bashing. When we were told that there would be debate on the law and order situation we naturally felt happy that finally our representatives will talk about a problem that is crippling our lives, our economy, our children and obviously our future.

To start with, the Treasury Bench unnecessarily dilly-dallied in starting the debate. On the first day it contrived a postponement and on the second it delayed it without a debate on point of order. These are all acceptable parliamentary tactics but quite wasteful for us, particularly when people really want the topic to be discussed. Finally when the so-called debate did come to surface, what did we hear except mutual recrimination and time wasted on personal explanation? It all got started when one treasury bencher made an accusatory remark against the former home minister, Md. Nasim. In his reply he attacked the accuser and three other BNP ministers, who then had to be given chances to reply. These ministers in turn in their replies made vicious attacks against Nasim, who then wanted time again to reply. Thus our much-awaited debate on law and order got mired in abuse and counter-abuse being hurled at each other and nothing that we wanted discussed ever got talked about.

About the last day's speech of the Leader of the Opposition one must admit that the Speaker really tried to give a lot of time to her. He first intervened after 50 minutes of continuous speaking by Sheikh Hasina. Most of the greatest parliament speeches in world history were made in less time than that. If Sheikh Hasina really wanted she could have said everything important, relevant and necessary within that time. But she did not, and made her speech unnecessarily long and thereby warranting Speaker's intervention and ruling party objection. However the treasury bench should have allowed the Speaker to handle the situation himself without creating chaos and confusion and reducing the House to a free for all shouting match. In parliamentary practice, especially in case of concluding speeches the two leaders -- of the House and of the opposition -- are usually given as much time as they wish. So a good precedent could have been set.

The good thing was that the opposition stayed throughout and made use (more of it was abuse) of the forum to say their piece. We noticed a new determination on its part to work from within the parliament, for which we commend them and urge them to continue with it. Never should they leave the House of the People, which is what the parliament is.

However, we must point out to both sides that they must stop wasting taxpayers' money in mutual acrimony and focus on issues. Opposition should realise that much can be said, and often more damaging things, without being personal and offensive. Sometimes a calmer and sober presentation carry more weight with the audience. More can be put across when viewers, listeners and readers see that the approach was fair, factual and constructive rather than aggressive, rhetorical and abusive. The treasury bench on the other hand must realise that using parliamentary tactics to prevent the opposition from speaking or speaking at the right time may look clever but ultimately it proves self-defeating. People are wise enough to draw their own conclusions.

We conclude by reminding our honourable MPs that the taxpayers are becoming impatient with your performance. We see no acrimony, no debate, not even the minutest sign of dissent when it comes to increasing their perks. But when it comes to our issues and our concerns sessions are cut to four days because there are no 'issues' to necessitate a longer session. At the end when law and order was admitted for a debate, only one hour was officially allocated for it. Can this be credible that our parliament could only spare one hour for a debate on law and order? Who are we fooling? Only ourselves.

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

"Bush, Bangladesh and 9/11"

This is in reference to the letter by Mr ES, Missouri, USA (September 16). Our friend expects us to condemn the terrorist attack on WTC. Yes, we do. But why should the Bangladesh government send a message of solidarity when the Americans did not do so in Bangladesh's time of need (the Liberation War of 1971)? It's been a year after the notorious attacks on USA but it's been YEARS since the crisis in the Middle East began! Has or does anyone mourn the deaths arising out of the situation?

HNC Dhaka

This refers to the letter of Mr ES. If what ES complains about, lack of gesture of condolence from Bangladesh on 9/11, is indeed true; I feel very proud that for once Bangladesh has shown to the rest of the world that we may be poor, we may be the most corrupt but when it comes to being fair on issues, we are at the top. Bangladesh does not

differentiate between loss of lives of human beings, may it be in the USA, Afghanistan, Palestine or Iraq for that matter. We would like the civilised nations of the world to take our silence on the issue as a protest against American double standard. If President Bush is a true Christian, he must know that in the eyes of the lord, we are all equal!

As for what our Prime Minister is going to tell the members of the US congress, I suggest she tell them exactly what was said above. As for you, Mr ES, please do not develop a "tunnel vision"(you see only what you want to see and not what is actually there to see) like all Americans, just because you are living in America. Your "whole civilised world" belongs to the hypocrites; that is all the more reason for us to show respect to the event by remaining silent.

A Thinker Dhaka
'Criminal' commissioner?
I fail to understand why you have made such a huge issue out of the Commissioner Shahid affair. Mur-

derer or not, if he can be voted to the post by the people of his ward, why can't he take oath?

By voting him to power, the people have clearly made a choice i.e. they want to see Shahid at office.
And for the rest of us, haven't we all voted lesser or larger versions of Shahid to parliament? So why the fuss!
Daiyaan Murshed Mogbazar, Dhaka
'AL on wheatscam'
The news item on AL probe report about wheatscam is a good sign in our political horizon.
A party out of office has submitted their findings on a matter of current issue after an investigation. They might have tried to belittle their opponents, but the cards are on the table.
Your front-page report on September 11 is sufficiently detailed and to the point. The affected persons/party can give their reply similarly point by point. If the trend is upheld and reciprocated our politicians can get back the respect of the people they represent. The

politicians should avoid vague accusations and sweeping comments. There are ways to make *hartals* extinct.
MAH Dhaka

Of murder and murderer
Recently the verdict of the murder of Jibran Tayobee, an Indian citizen killed in Chittagong by professional murderers, has been given. Out of the seven accused persons, five got life imprisonment and two went scot-free.
The professional murderers who kill people for money are surely the most despicable persons and deserve capital punishment. But those who employ them, lure them to commit such crime, are more guilty. Why aren't these people who remain behind the curtain brought to justice?
Nur Jahan Chittagong
"Great Army"
While growing up, war and warriors used to fascinate us most. We used

to spend our leisure time grouped around listening to some amazing and bizarre stories with eyes wide open. And one such story in every civilisation would always be heard with endless interest -- each time with a new outlook. A story of a great army of a great nation supposedly housed, fed, trained very secretly underground. They would never see the daylight nor would come in contact with any other soul. They would only be released and surfaced at the most critical time and the great army would eat up any and all living creatures around them. The story-teller would vouch on the authenticity.

I suppose the time has come for our great army to go underground -- I mean garrisoned sub surface, at least away from Dhaka to avoid all the sense and sensibility befalling on them.
I wonder what could be the substitute to a great army in that case?
Tanzia Chowdhury Dhaka

Vox Populi's letter on "Great Army" (August 31) offers a new argument. The letter pointed out that the armed force follow some discrimi-

natory practice while renting auditoriums -- the civil officials have to pay almost 4 times more than the uniformed people.
Just to mention the charges of "Sena Kunja" -- the armed force is required to pay about Taka 20,000 or so whereas the civil officials pay about Tk 84,000 for the same place. In the BDR Darbar Hall, the civil officials pay about Tk 60,000 whereas the armed forces people pay about Tk 15000 or so.

Why this discriminatory practice between the two sets of government officials when both are serving the same authority?
Mohammad sharif Dhanmondi, Dhaka

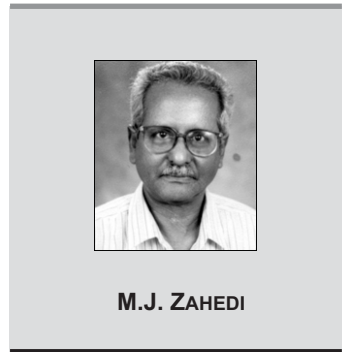
This is a reply to the letter from the Man in Uniform stating that the information regarding Bangladesh troops in Bosnia is incorrect. The information I read from transcripts from a session of the United Kingdom Parliament.
Here is the paragraph from the site: "It is worth reminding ourselves when we talk about Europe and NATO that not only Western Europe

is involved. We should not forget the Bangladeshis, the Kenyans or the New Zealanders serving in Bosnia. Of course our own troops must be our first priority and interest in the context of military action and changing the mandate, but we must not forget that the United Nations has gone to a great deal of expense and spent a great deal of time in ensuring that some of these troops are adequately kitted out. Some time ago, there were reports of Bangladeshi troops in the Bihac enclave with one rifle between four men. That puts the difficult task of changing the mandate in context."

After reading that, I searched for information on the issue over the net and several other sites stated that one-fourth of the Bangladeshi troops were armed. Is the British parliamentarian and the international press lying? I ask the Man in Uniform to reply.
Rashid Chowdhury Dhaka
"Of English and Bangla"
My son studies in a reputed English Medium school and I think his

overall knowledge in Bangla is sound. Of course it varies from school to school.
In this regard, I would like to say that to be versed in any subject one should read or practice more and more. And it is our duty to make our children get interested in Bangla. Both the school authority and guardians should play the role. I came across some parents who feel proud of saying that their children don't want to read Bangla. This is really unfortunate.
There are many interesting books available in Bangla and during vacation or when the exam is over we can encourage our children to read these books. In this way their reading habit will grow and their knowledge in Bangla will enrich. Apart from this, we can also encourage them to read Bengali newspaper.
The school authority should also be careful and serious in teaching Bangla -- our mother tongue. Naturally, in an English medium school Bangla teaching might be less prioritised. But it shouldn't be this way.
A reader Dhaka

Nine/eleven: Impact on Pakistan



M.J. ZAHEDI

SINCE last year the world has changed immensely. On September 11, 2001, terror attacks were made in America. But the attacks were not only in America alone. The entire world had been 'hit' by the explosions that occurred in Washington and New York. Countries near and far were indirectly affected by the blasts. Since then the world has undergone tremendous change, not physically though. The incidents that happened on September 11, 2001, have left far-reaching effects on global and national politics, economy and values. Of course, the biggest sufferers are the Americans themselves; their values and civil liberties have been damaged.
Pakistan too has lost a great deal. For example, the Kashmir case has fallen a victim of the Americans' new approach to the world order. As retired General Hamid Gul, a former

director general, Inter-Services Intelligence, has said, the Americans were now demanding to use Pakistan in the hunt for Al Qaeda 'by placing Pakistani troops under American command'. Naturally, the Pakistan Press has carried a lot about the September 11, 2001, incidents. They are doing so even

were only nine billion US dollars against the target of ten billion.
Pakistanis have diverse opinions on the war. Some think it has gone sour for the Americans, some see it as a human tragedy, some see its impact on the world's economy as a tragedy that has left consequences of vital importance for many years to

deprivation, foreign occupation, repression and denial of human rights. The paper quoted commentators as maintaining that the 'war on terrorism' has ended 'talibanising' the West itself. The conflict has been termed a battle between two extremists, with the protagonists refusing to see any shades of grey. The

government was taking steps prior to September 11 events to correct the country's economy. Reserves were building in 2001 and economic reforms had started to work well before the 9/11 scenario. The general positive direction helped Pakistan handle the post-9/11 shocks better. The IMF also helped by

the country had already gained from IMF help and removal of economic sanctions and more market access by EU and US. The country now has a comfortable position with regard to reserves and all other indicators, such as revenue, exports, imports, inflation, stabilization in exchange rate and performing well during the first two months period (July-August) of the current fiscal year (2002-2003). A strong base has been provided to the upcoming political government -- the future government will be in a position to achieve goal of prosperity during the democratic regimes, despite the lingering military stand off between Pakistan and India which has also burdened Pakistan's economy and the government's efforts to restore investor-confidence.
The September 2001 attacks had a profound impact on Pakistan's history, changing the policies and priorities of the world. What the US has achieved in Afghanistan has had deep impact on Pakistan and the entire region. The adverse effects as well as the lingering military standoff between Pakistan and India also burdened the economy. But one hopes that the political government that will take power after the October elections, will be in a position to achieve the goal of prosperity.

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

LETTER FROM KARACHI

The negative effects started fading in post-April 2002 period as the country had already gained from IMF help and removal of economic sanctions and more market access by EU and US. The country now has a comfortable position with regard to reserves and all other indicators, such as revenue, exports, imports, inflation, stabilization in exchange rate and performing well during the first two months period (July-August) of the current fiscal year (2002-2003).

now. The Press and other media have not stopped writing about what happened in America on September 11 last year and how the tragic events have affected the world as well as Pakistan. The most damage has mostly been on the economy. According to one estimate, at least one hundred thousand jobs have been lost in the tourist industry alone. The slow-down in the world economy has also had its impact on Pakistan's economy. For example, it has affected the demand for Pakistani exports like textile and carpets. In 2001, Pakistan's total exports

come, some say it has created a new turn in political and economic history. On the economic side, it has increased the risks of the world moving towards dangerously close to recession.
On the political side, as daily 'The News' put it, September 11 has helped invent a new 'evil' adversary for the West. It said, unfortunately, instead of addressing the root causes of 'terrorism', the Western powers, led by the USA, seem determined to aggravate these causes. President Pervez Musharraf has identified these as economic

conflict is reminiscent also of the kindergarten after-school fights: you are either with us or against us. The only difference is that one group has the most devastating firepower mankind has ever known.
According to one estimate Pakistan has suffered a loss of US \$3 billion during the last one year. But the subsequent removal of economic sanctions and increased access to the EU market helped rally the economy. And experts see future prospects of stronger economic position of the country after the upcoming October elections. The

providing more funds. According to a senior official of the Pakistan Finance Ministry, the economy faced adverse shocks during October-March period after the 9/11 incidents. It affected Pakistan in the shape of dwindling exports and revenue etc. The economy faced losses in the short term. Apprehensions that Pakistan may be declared a war zone also had adverse effects on exports. Further adverse effects on the economy came when India deployed troops across the border.
But the negative effects started fading in post-April 2002 period as