

Ineffective municipalities

Development potential should be the key factor

THE Public Expenditure Review Commission (PERC) has found that 174 out of the 276 municipalities in the country hardly offer any civic amenities to citizens. They have also fallen far short of achieving the target of emerging as self-financed organisations.

Most of the municipalities were set up after 1990, and the majority of them are performing poorly. So the idea of extending an important tier of the local government down to the upazila level has failed to attain its prime objective—creating civic amenities for more and more people. It could also have been effective in containing the migration of rural people to the urban centres.

The PERC has recommended that government grants should be suspended for the municipalities, which will fail to realise 75 per cent of the municipal taxes. The suggestion was made with 14 other recommendations aiming to streamline the municipal administration as a whole. The performance of the newly set up municipalities has been so disappointing that even the question of shuttering several of them down has been raised. At the same time, the PERC believes that the process of setting up new municipalities should remain suspended for five years.

However, the issue is far from simple since the idea of raising the number of municipalities is not bad in itself. As an economist has pointed out, the decision-makers must attach due importance to the development factor in assessing the utility of a municipality. The municipal bodies having the potential to grow into a centre of development should not be a burden on the government. But if such bodies were set up with political motives, then the whole purpose of strengthening the local government administration will be defeated. The criterion for a municipality to justify its existence should be its development potential, not political importance.

The government should enable the municipal bodies to become self-financed organisations. The first task is to take stock of their assets and liabilities. Then the government should provide infrastructural support and finally the municipal bodies have to be integrated within the framework of national economy.

Public thoroughfares

BNP's free use of freeways

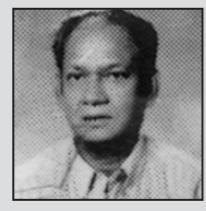
ANY encroachment on a public thoroughfare is condemnable; but when a ruling party indulges in it, that's bound to draw a stronger flak. This is mainly because the governing party is the one most obliged to follow the rules and set example for others. Blocking a road, whether it is busy or not, for political party purposes, can be seen in no other country of the world.

What happens is that in most cases, a stage would be erected in the middle of the street on a bamboo platform and chairs laid out in rows for the audience in front of it. When the programme begins, apart from the audience, passers-by throng the place crowding it all around.

And that's exactly what the assortment of pictures on the front page of Tuesday's Daily Star portrays. The cultural wing of ruling BNP erected a stage right in the middle of street that leads to the busy Sadarghat launch terminal in old Dhaka, to hold a commemorative meeting. The photos also showed how oblivious the organisers were to the hardship the launch passengers had to go through, not to forget the terrible traffic jam such an irrational action created in the vicinity. For a handful of people, thousands were forced to go through terrible difficulties.

As it is, illegal encroachments of roads and pavements have made travelling an arduous task. Roads are already burdened; faulty construction of damaged roads is rampant; and construction materials are lying on the street-shoulders. After all these, how could one look kindly on any further invasion of thoroughfares? One should hold rallies or demonstrations at designated spots, not on the streets. We simply fail to understand how Dhaka City Corporation allowed such a violation of rules? On a second thought, the question of seeking and granting permission shouldn't arise at all. Because sanctity of the road should be a guaranteed thing; impingement should be automatically ruled out.

Storm signal in Pakistan



ARSHAD-UZ-ZAMAN

THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

It is difficult to conceive how Sharia laws can be made mandatory throughout Pakistan. In Peshawar a clear challenge has been thrown at the leadership in Islamabad to choose the path of Sharia. This is a difficult choice for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. It would seem that the Taliban, which sprang from Peshawar has returned home after its misadventure in Kabul.

Gen. Musharraf has the example of Field Marshal Ayub Khan, who ruled Pakistan for a decade. He too held the twin posts as long as possible and finally handed over the post of Chief of Staff of the Army to his very loyal General Musa. Finally Gen. Musa had to be replaced by Gen. Yahya Khan. Ayub was forced to hand over power to Gen. Yahya because his illness had made the situation difficult and the rising tide of discontent in both the then East Pakistan and West Pakistan made it more so.

Gen. Musharraf is aware that the armed forces is his most important constituency as it has been for his predecessors Gen. Ayub Khan, Gen. Yahya Khan and others. He is faced with the dilemma of keeping his post of President but divesting himself of his most powerful post, the Chief of Army Staff. Since he has traveled a long way towards the democratisation process it is difficult to see how he can retain the Army job. The politicians sensing that they have the President in their grip are piling on the pressure. While Pakistan's Parliament was due to meet for the Budget session, the opposition threatened to stop the passage of the Budget, creating a full blown crisis. In the opposition there is a curious mix of religious and secular parties. Jamali's Government was elected in October last after three years of direct military rule. The

result of the elections is a hung parliament inspite of charges that the elections were manipulated by the government. It is worth recalling that pandemonium broke loose within the Parliament last April with opposition shouting "Musharraf go".

Amidst such rowdy scenes in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, developments in Peshawar, the capital of NWFP, will cause severe headache to Gen. Musharraf. This large area of Pakistan, bordering Afghanistan has a lot in common with the Afghans. They in most part belong to the same ethnic variety,

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speak the same language Pashtoo and indeed have blood ties. During the war against the Soviet Union, the war was masterminded from Peshawar as weapons were stockpiled near Peshawar and the Soviet forces withdrew after a humiliating defeat in the late eighties. The Afghan misadventure was the principal reason for the cataclysmic event -- the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Kabul, left a power void in Kabul, which was filled by the Taliban regime, masterminded by the ISI, the shadowy intelligence

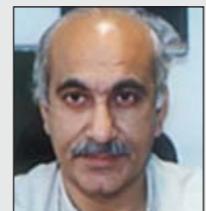
outfit of Pakistan. The Taliban perpetrated atrocities in the name of Islam. Indeed it made a caricature of Islam. Osama Bin Laden, the Saudi millionaire, who had started a war against the US, after serving them in Afghanistan, had taken refuge in the safe sanctuary of the Taliban regime in Kabul. In retaliation for the massive blow suffered by the US within their own territory (this led to the fall of the US from the super-power pedestal) allegedly masterminded by Bin Laden, the US started destroying the Taliban regime. There was a remarkable reversal of role for Pakistan, in order to break out of her isolation she joined hands with the US in ousting her own creation Taliban from power.

Facing massive bombardment the Taliban took flight and in all likelihood many took refuge with their kith and kin in the Pakistani tribal areas. And interestingly the Provincial Assembly in Peshawar has voted in favour of Sharia. It must be noted that the Taliban went much further than what is sanctioned by Sharia. Their behaviour pattern with their women and the destruction of the Buddhist statue in Bamiyan are two glaring examples. Yet it must be noted that in the entire Islamic world of 57 nations, Sharia is practiced only in Saudi Arabia.

Pakistan for long has been advocating Islamisation of her society. With the turmoil taking place inside the National Assembly in Islamabad and storm clouds appearing in Peshawar, the Pakistani establishment may be tempted once again to try the tested medicine -- a further dose of military rule with or without Gen. Pervez Musharraf.

Arshad-Uz-Zaman is a former Ambassador.

Mosquito bite



M.J. AKBAR

If there are any, and accommodate the other when necessary. There is also no question as to who is the leader of the party. That responsibility is Mr Vajpayee's and will remain so until either he, or God, decides otherwise. Take it as definite that he is not going to retire, irrespective of what an interviewer may suggest Mr Vajpayee has suggested. To retire you have to tire first. Judging by the bounce in the Prime Minister's step during his foreign tour, he is totally refreshed. End of story.

Frankly, there would have been more of a story if media had dis-

note? The Prime Minister does not suffer from any lack of self-esteem, or any excess of ambition. He also knows that nothing increases the prestige of a politician in India more than the occasional suggestion of retirement, particularly when he knows that his indispensable. But only a very dispensable politician claims indispensability. A good one is never frightened of walking away because he knows that colleagues will block the path. Jawaharlal Nehru was a master of the art, and Vajpayee is a good disciple.

Mr Naidu's problem is familiar. He

Maharashtra, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi. It picked up seats in Uttar Pradesh as well, but did not do as well as it expected. At the moment, the BJP is extremely well-placed to repeat its performance in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh (now two states) and Rajasthan because of the anti-incumbency factor. The BJP was, in a way, fortunate enough to lose the Assembly elections in these three states, and the Congress will pay a price for being in power. In the case of Madhya Pradesh, that becomes a curious kind of pun because Digvijay Singh is going to be pun-

cheque on the vote bank. If the BJP waits till October 2004 to go to the polls, the calculations could be completely different. Uma Bharti will win in Madhya Pradesh because of Digvijay Singh. But let Uma Bharti be chief minister for a year and Digvijay Singh will look like a demigod to the voter. Uma Bharti could easily hand back the Parliament seats to the Congress. The anti-incumbency factor will begin to work against the BJP by the end of 2004 in the states. The alliance with Mayawati in Uttar Pradesh will also be vulnerable by then to her unique capacity for dividing her supporters



Subtly, but effectively, the Prime Minister has changed the national discourse to co-existence. He does nothing without a purpose. And since no one knows the perils of mountain-climbing in the company of Pakistan better than him, he has shifted the perspective as well. He is not talking of summits; he is only discussing forward movement, which is much more do-able, and less prone to fatal accidents. He has changed the line of perception.

cussed what happens to mosquitoes in a heat wave. It is a question to which I really need an answer. I know they disappear, but do they die? Or is there some mosquito haven where they push off to hibernate when the temperature goes up to 48 degrees? If they die, then why would have been a better story.

However, I do resent the implication that this non-story was totally

cooked up by media. It was not.

It was lying calmly in a cold and unsee

ing fry pan when BJP president Venkaiah Naidu picked it up and threw it into the fire. He has ended up with burnt fingers but what else did he expect? A thank-you

cannot see things very clearly at the moment because his eyes are hazy from the tears of laughter.

Why has he started laughing? Because he believes that he can laugh all the way to the vote banks of the next general elections. Such laughter is not without its hazards.

The bank may remain where it is, but you can always lose your way if you can't see through those tears of laughter. You also have to know how to cash the cheque. There are politicians who have misplaced a winning lottery ticket because they were either too careless (Charan Singh) or too careful (P.V. Narasimha Rao).

Mr Naidu may be justified in his assessment. The first calculation of political party searching for re-election is whether it can retain all or most of the seats it has. The BJP's Lok Sabha strength comes from

ished for being in power without providing electricity to the people. Put another way: out of power means being out of power. There is a wave in Madhya Pradesh against non-governance. Ashok Gehlot also faces defeat, albeit by smaller margins.

There is a strong anti-incumbency current in Maharashtra as well, so the BJP can be confident of retaining its Parliament seats in these states. Thanks to its alliance in Uttar Pradesh, it will also retain its strength in Uttar Pradesh, if not increase it. It could go down in Bihar, but will compensate in Punjab and the Northeast. If the party can keep its numbers in the Lok Sabha it can legitimately claim a splendid victory and comfortably head another coalition for the next five years.

There is a caveat though. You have to know when to cash the

and uniting the Opposition. Vengeance comes naturally to her, and it corrodes on all sides. An alliance between political leaders is useful, but it acquires depth only when the political parties fight a common battle on the streets. Mayawati could unite the Samajwadi Party and the Congress in a way Mulayam Singh Yadav and Sonia Gandhi cannot.

The ruling party's calculations must force include an objective assessment of the main Opposition party's strengths and weaknesses. The Congress is at a pretty low ebb at this moment. The only states where it will improve its Lok Sabha strength are Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. At best it can retain what it has in Kerala and Maharashtra. In Karnataka it will lose perhaps up to half the seats it has. The Congress still does not exist in Tamil Nadu,

IUCN and WWF, develop guidelines for managing modern barrier-free, state of the art zoos, prepare zoo management protocols, and register all captive animal species with the ISIS (International Species Information System) and get all the programmes of the ISIS through the CBSG or WAZA.

Main aim of the BAZA should be to make zoos as educational institutions with objectives of making these as popular places of attractions for the members of the public; centre of ex-situ breeding of rare and endangered species of home, region and abroad; a place for interaction with the wild animals close to one's home town; and take programme for reintroduction of certain captive-bred animals into the wilderness areas, such species in question are the hooved mammals, wildfowl, ducks and geese, some turtles, monitor lizards and crocodile.

Overall a zoo should be a place of animal conservation, learning, amusement and earning.

Dr. Reza Khan, formerly an Associate Professor of Zoology, Dhaka University, is Head of Dubai Zoo, Member, World Commission of Protected Areas, Cat Specialist Group and CBSG of IUCN, and World Zoo and Aquarium Association.

OPINION

Zoo tiger in the wild!

MOHAMMED ALI REZA KHAN

THIS is in reference to DS news article Bengal Tigers face eviction (28-05-2003).

I have been a member of the IUCN – World Conservation Union's Cat Specialist Group – for over two decades and have been working with zoos for just over 18 years, managing a range of animal collections from Toads to Tigers. I have, in the present zoo, both Bengal and Siberian Tiger subspecies.

Never in my life have I ever heard of releasing a tiger to a natural reserve or natural forest like the Sundarbans.

No zoo in the world dreams of

releasing their tigers, or any other big cat species (Lion, Jaguar, Leopard and Snow Leopard) back into nature.

Neither IUCN, nor any other world

conservation organisations, like the WFT – worldwide fund for nature –, GTF – global tiger forum –, nor the CBSG – captive breeding specialist group of the IUCN –, ever prescribed any country or its zoos to release its captive-bred animals back to nature.

One may ask why a big cat cannot be released in nature. The layman's answer is very simple. This zoo or captive-bred animals see only human beings and a few zoo animals from the time of birth. They do not see any natural surroundings and the elements of biodiversity that form the basis of any wildlife sanctuary or a

reservoir, such as the intro-

Sundarbans.

So, when you release a Dhaka Zoo tiger, say in Kochikhali or Katka wildlife sanctuary in the Sundarbans, this action, I assure you, will have a number of reactions on the part of the animal. First reaction will be of immense shock beyond imagination. It would be as if a French, who knew no other language but his own, were to suddenly find himself/herself in Bangladesh, a strange and unknown land, where no one understands him/her and he/she does not understand any one. The moment a tiger is released from its protected, constantly cared for cage into any forest in the country, it will be stunned for the first few moments. Then it will look for a shelter, a built area such as those it had seen during its total confined life. In the forest it will not find a single place to hide itself. A captive tiger that, all through its life, ate only slaughtered beef or buffalo meat will never know how to kill a wild animal for food. So it will not know that the beautiful Chital, barking deer, wild boar/pig, monkeys, junglefowl roaming around it are all part of its diet. It will make no attempt to catch such free-roaming animals because a captive-bred tiger would never know the technique of hunting that a wild tiger would learn from its mother during the first two years of its life in the jungle. While playing with the siblings and mother tigers, juvenile tiger cubs in the wild learn the skill of napping a live prey. That instant is

lost in captive-bred animal.

It will never be able to find the difference between saline and fresh water and will not drink the saline water at first. But when it will have no other alternative, it will be forced to drink the saline water of the Sundarbans and will die either from thirst, hunger or from the consumption of saline water.

This is just a possible scenario with respect to the released captive tiger. Now the response from the residents of the area such as a monkey, deer, birds around and a resident tiger would be simply unimaginable. All non-carnivorous animals will raise havoc and panic at the site of a tiger within their vicinity and start producing alarm calls. As the released tiger is from a zoo, it will not know how to respond to such alarm calls from the prey species. It will remain standing in open without making any attempt to hide under a bush or a tree because that is not in its instinctive behaviour.

Within a day or two the resident tiger of the area, be it a male or female, will realise that it has an intruder in its territory. Survival and protective instincts will plague the resident tiger into frenzy, looking for signs of the intruder. Upon sighting the newly released tiger, the territory-holding resident tiger will inevitably attack it. Zoo tigers have no survival instincts on how to defend themselves from the attack of other tigers. So in a matter of minutes, the intro-

duced tiger will be killed by the resident tiger. It will be a disaster.

So, international cat groups, world association of zoos and aquaria (WAZA) – umbrella body for all the renowned and member zoos of the world (of which I am the only Bangladeshi member not from Bangladesh but from Dubai for running the Dubai zoo) – and CBSG do not recommend releasing a big cat into a wilderness area where there is already naturally occurring resident tiger, leopard, lion or snow leopard. Such animals can only be released in a completely fenced off new area or an island freshly populated with proper vegetation and animals needed to sustain a pair of tigers, leopards, etc.

Also such would-be released animals must be reared from the first day of their birth in a way that will keep them from any human contact. Instead they should be raised in such a way that they get the feeling of being raised by a tigress and the solid food offered them should be as close to their natural food such as deer, pig, junglefowl, etc. Also as they grow up they should be given a chance to hunt their own food, rather than be fed. This protocol is impossible for any zoo in Bangladesh to follow with the present management system in captivity.

So, as a member of the Cat Specialist group, CBSG and WAZA, I request the Ministry of Environment and Forest not to allow any zoo of

Bangladesh to release its tigers, leopards or even fishing cats into wilderness areas of the country.

Now what Dhaka Zoo can do with its surplus animals?

I take this opportunity to render some insight and possible suggestions:

1. Dhaka Zoo or for that matter any zoo of Bangladesh is not run by any scientist but veterinarians who have no clue to the ecology and behaviour of the wild animals that are kept in zoos round the world. Our zoos are managed by veterinarians who are fantastic animal physicians but poor with the treatment of wild animals because they have not had the opportunity to treat wild animals while completing their bachelor's degree courses from Mymensingh or other agricultural and veterinary institutions of the country. None of them know how to manage a zoo but they do so because these institutions are managed by the Department of Livestock services that have appointed them in the first place. So they become ex-officio zoo managers/curators without having any proper clue to the management of the wild animals in captivity.
2. Dhaka Zoo is to be held responsible for breeding such a large number of animals without

having any future plans for each species.

3. Each zoo must have a master plan for structure as well as living residents of a captive breeding centre. Dhaka Zoo and other zoos in the country do not have any such plan in place.
4. They must have mechanisms to control the zoo population of animals, including family planning, using anti-pregnancy pills, putting on coils, breeding inhibition patch, separating