

After three years, where are we?

Misgovernance negates progress

THREE years of a government's tenure is no small time-period. For, it is the afternoon of a government's term. At this point, essential signs of how the rest of its tenure will go can be read.

Even in the life of a nation three years is no mean spell of time, given the fast-track advancing world of today, let alone the whizzing pace of development in China, India and Malaysia. Mustn't we picture ourselves against the panorama of countries which began at the same time we did but have left us behind?

On some social development indicators we have fared well, even 'outperformed' rest of the region but 'at our level of income', a significant pointer to our limitation. We have done well in the areas of water access and sanitation, and in terms of lower morbidity, mortality, control of birth rate, female education and the like. The credit goes in part to the government for maintaining momentum of past trends, in part to the social dynamics linked to certain processes and in part to the dynamism of certain NGOs.

In macroeconomic terms, there have been increases in forex reserve and FDI inflows but indicators like inflation, government borrowing and deficit financing give negative signals.

The overriding fact is that given our baseline, even incremental growth is not enough what's critically important is sustainable development. Whatever success the government claims is outweighed by its abysmal failures in a wide range of vital areas of national life. And the factors that cancel out 'achievements' also make the latter unsustainable.

The mathematical averages may give the BNP-led coalition some satisfaction, but the feel good factor is sorely missing as dependency takes over the national psyche. People have no peace of mind and no sense of security in terms of life, property and future. Political interference in administration, PMO's supra-ministerial role, politicisation of the police, corruption in institutions and high places and seeing everything through the party eye have messed up governance.

The biggest arms haul, the most dastardly grenade attack on opposition political rally and the series of bomb blasts topped off by poor investigations are a ringing indictment on the alliance's failure to govern. That the normal instruments of crime control have failed us is amply demonstrated by the creation of a wide range of crime-busting forces. Ominously, instances of journalist killing and religious militancy are on the rise.

Parliamentary democracy has received a severe blow from the failure of the ruling party to engage the opposition in a dialogue. Political confrontation is compounded by indiscriminate arrests.

What is the way out? The force of electoral mandate behind the BNP-led coalition is fast wearing thin. What vision has the alliance got to stop the nation's downhill journey? People would like to know.

People, police thwart Ahmadiyya mosque raid

This is how it should be

WE are relieved and somewhat delighted too by the quick and timely steps taken jointly by civil society, local people and most importantly law enforcing agencies to thwart a planned raid by religious zealots on an Ahmadiyya mosque in Narayanganj last Friday. The coordinated effort clearly proved that the zealots can be resisted if there is a will on the part of the secular forces to stop them on their tracks, definitely with the help of the authorities. Here we must congratulate the police force on their promptly taking measures to prevent the trouble-mongers from entering the city.

This is the most positive news regarding the Ahmadiyyas ever since they came under scathing attack from some fanatic Muslims. This is how it should be. If and when a minority group of any religion, caste or creed come under threat from Islamic bigots, this is exactly the way the police and saner members of the society should react to protect them. And we are glad to see that there still are people around us who are willing to take that most important step, who would come forward to denounce those giving religion a totally negative image.

This wasn't, however, the first time the Ahmadiyyas came under threat. Not so long ago, the zealots had demanded that Ahmadiyyas be declared non-Muslims instantly. We have continuously condemned such attempts to violate a citizen's right to freely practise his or her own religious beliefs. The inaction on the part of the alliance government to catch and punish the culprits was encouraging them to continue with their hate campaign. It is heartening to note that the authorities in Narayanganj preempted the attack on Ahmadiyyas. We hope this wouldn't be an isolated incident. The threats have not stopped, one of which looms over Nakhalpara mosque in the capital. We urge the government to rein in such intolerance with an iron fist. Society must be allowed to enjoy religious harmony.

A new generation of Islamic militancy



M ABDUL HAFIZ

NOW an anathema but both Taliban and Al-Qaeda were once the darlings of the America's CIA under the rubric of Afghan Mujahideens fighting the Soviet occupation during the eighties. The fanatic mullahs of the deeply conservative country were lured to undertake Jihad against the infidels of another hue by their CIA and ISI handlers. Encouraged by the US and its Saudi lackey the Muslims from all over Arab-Islamic world flocked to Afghanistan to fight the holy war and, if possible court martyrdom. Fired by an indomitable spirit of Jihad a redoubtable Osama bin Laden, a Saudi fugitive also chose to hole up in Afghanistan and take the helm of an emerging Islamic militancy although his al-Qaeda terrorist network was already in existence by then.

The mainstay of the Mujahideen could not be anything other than their fanaticism and raw courage to fight. Given their background they, of course, fought bravely but perhaps purposelessly. So, once they won the war with the Soviet occupiers they didn't know how to take it to some useful consequence. Many of them, however, became hardened Al-Qaeda operative while others joined the ranks of

Taliban trained in the religious seminaries of bordering NWFP and Balochistan of Pakistan the role of which in supporting and pushing them into Afghanistan is amply testified. The intrepid Taliban fighters fought tenaciously against the West's anti-terror coalition forces and refused to capitulate en masse. This is in spite of their many limitations -- they being uneducated, poor and without a world view of their own.

Now well educated youngmen

the call of Jihad. Pakistan, the front-line state of the West's war on terror has, interestingly, been the breeding ground of the terrorists linked with international Al-Qaeda network. This is in tandem with Pakistan's U-turn with regards to Taliban.

The new cadre however boasts of highly qualified professionals, and university graduates. These children of opportunity, rather than deprivation are masterminds behind many of the recent terrorist

sure trove' of information about Al-Qaeda's terrorist plan. His interrogation led to the tracking down of Ahmed Khaifa Ghailani, a Tanzanian national indicted for murder in connection with 1998 bombing of US embassies in East Africa and the arrests of several other Al-Qaeda operatives in Britain. Ghailani's recent arrest in Pakistan's Gujrat city is considered one of the most prized catch.

These setbacks notwithstanding, the new breed of Al-Qaeda and

lance and widescale arrests of its operatives -- thanks to the supports of well-knit cells like Jundullah which is rated as one of the fiercest militant groups behind recent spate of violence in Karachi. The group hit the headlines after a daring attack last month on the motorcade of Karachi's corps commander.

Jundullah is but one of the many small terrorist cells now operating in Karachi alone. According to Karachi police chief the members

who suffered the government's blanket crackdown in the name of so-called enlightened moderation to close their ranks.

In fact there has been tremendous upsurge in moral and intellectual anger among the radical Muslim youths in Pakistan against military establishment for hunting down Al-Qaeda fugitives at the US' behest. Consequently the rise of splinter cells has made the task of the authority in Pakistan difficult indeed. The terrorist groups are multiplying as the government crackdown intensifies. They are increasingly targeting western assets and security forces including the country's military ruler.

In December last year there have been two attempts on the life of General Musharraf who narrowly escaped. The focus of the terrorists' interest is widening to include any one considered close to the US interest like Prime Minister Shaukat-Aziz, believed to be implanted by the US. He also escaped an attack on him.

Pakistan government describes the capture of high profile Al-Qaeda operatives like Ghailani, Musaad Aruchi and Dawood Badani as its triumph in the war on terror. But that has not tamed the new generation of Al-Qaeda. They struck back by targeting the heavy weights of both military and civilian leadership. The failed assassination attempt on Shaukat Aziz came hours after Pakistan announced Ghailani's capture.

According to police the attack on Shaukat Aziz carried all of Al-Qaeda's hallmarks. In a quick riposte it was a tit for tat of sorts.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of B.I.S.S.

Should the legislators be involved in development work?

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

LEGISLATURE is one of the three basic pillars of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the other two being executive and judiciary. The Constitution of Bangladesh has delineated functions and responsibilities of these three organs of the State. Formation of policies of the government, execution of policies, and supervision of execution of policies and enforcement of laws are vested in the executive. Legislative power of the Republic is vested in its Parliament while the judicial power is vested in the courts with the Supreme Court at its apex. Article 65 of the Constitution of Bangladesh provides for a Parliament for Bangladesh in which is vested the legislative powers of the Republic. The Constitution (Fourteenth Amendment) Act, 2004 providing for reserved forty-five seats exclusively for women members brings the total number of seats of members of Parliament to 345 at the moment.

According to the Constitution and the Rules of procedure of Parliament, the functions and responsibilities of the legislators include, inter alia, (1) electing the President of Bangladesh; (2) electing a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker of Parliament at its first sitting after any general election; (3) making Rules of Procedure for smooth functioning of Parliament; (4) asking both starred and unstarred questions; (5) asking question(s) relating to a matter(s) of public importance; (6) calling attention to matters of urgent public interest; (7) moving a resolution relating to a matter of general public

interest; (8) participating in the deliberations of a parliamentary committee on a ministry and / or any other parliamentary committee such as Committee on Private Members' Bills and Resolutions, Select Committee on Bills, Committee on Public Accounts, Committee on Estimates, Committee on Public Estimates to which he / she is nominated and discharging the functions assigned to such committee(s); (9) participating in the discussion on President's

These rules have, however, undergone several amendments. A good parliamentarian has to be well conversant with these rules. He/she has to be knowledgeable about the Constitution and important laws; he/she should be conversant with the working of the government; he/she has to go through the proceedings of the past parliaments; he/she has to learn from the biographies and writings of the reputed parliamentarians, national and

international; he/she should enrich himself/herself with the proceedings of parliaments in other countries. A vibrant House full of lawmakers representing the ruling party/ alliance and the opposition parties including the main opposition party is a good ground for training of the lawmakers, particularly for the young ones. A good parliamentarian is an asset for the nation and can make invaluable contribution to the functioning of the democratic system in the country.

To discharge the aforesaid functions and responsibilities efficiently a legislator has to keep him/ her busy in the House and within the precincts of the House whether the Parliament is in session or not. So, a legislator is left with little or no time to look after any other work. But

these rules have been happening in the reverse way. Zila Parishad (district Council) and Upazila Parishad (sub-district Council) have been made non-functional since the early nineties. The MPs have been involved in the execution of local works, both developmental and non-developmental. In the words of an analyst : " Most MPs, irrespective of political affiliation, did not want any powerful rival in the constituency in the form of a directly elected Upazila Parishad Chairman, wielding substantial power over development resources. Although the MP is meant exclusively for making laws in the Parliament, in the concrete conditions of Bangladesh, he/she must have the last say in all developmental matters within his/her constituency."

address to Parliament at the commencement of the first session after a general election of members of Parliament and at the commencement of the first session of each year ; (10) participating in the budget discussion and in matters pertaining to it; (11) participating in debates on bills and voting, in favour of or against, their passage; (12) voting on a question saying "Aye" (in favour of the motion) or "No" (against the motion); (12) moving a motion expressing want of confidence in the Cabinet of Bangladesh.

The details of the above functions and responsibilities have been laid down in the Rules of Procedure of Parliament. Procedure of Parliament is regulated by Rules of Procedure made by Parliament and adopted by it on July 22, 1974.

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elected Upazila Parishad Chairman, wielding substantial power over development resources to build schools and roads. As the saying goes in Bengali, how can there be two Peers (religious leaders) under one roof? Although the MP is meant exclusively for making laws in the Parliament, in the concrete conditions of Bangladesh, he/she must have the last say in all developmental matters within his/her constituency." Another analyst says, "At the highest level of representative government, we have the honourable members of parliament whose primary role is legislative. The issue that becomes relevant here is what proportion of time of the honourable members is spent on law making? In the 300 seats of parliament we, in fact, elect

300 executives."

Now let us try to analyse as to why MPs should not be involved in the execution of local works, developmental or non-developmental.

λ Involvement of the MPs in local developmental or non-development works in the capacity of advisers is at variance with the functions and responsibilities assigned to them by the Constitution and Rules of Proce-

which may include functions relating to (a) administration and the work of public officers; (b) the maintenance of public order; (c) the preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development.

Keeping this in view, Public Administration Reforms Commission in its report (vol. 1) of June, 2000 has recommended that "the role of the MP as Upazila Adviser may be reviewed and he/ she may be involved only in planning matters relating to his/her jurisdiction."

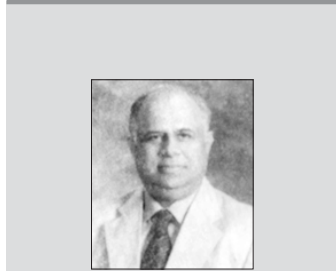
λ According to some analysts, legislators' involvement in local development activities has been creating dissatisfaction at the local level. Such dissatisfaction has harmful effect on the political process leading ultimately to dishonest and unethical practices.

λ The National Union Parishads Forum(NUPF) has already requested the government to stop unwarranted interference of the MPs in the affairs of the union parishads.'

λ The abolition of the Upazila Parishads headed by directly elected chairmen and the immense influence now exercised by the MPs on the local administration has been an obstacle to the growth of local level leadership.

M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary to the government.

Arms purchases and developing countries



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

MILITARY spending, security and economic development are interrelated variables. A typically Keynesian argument is that military spending stimulates economic growth like any other fiscal expenditure, benefiting the economy by viz (1) training manpower for future insertion into the labour market, (2) modernisation of the economy through technologically advanced Defence industries and (3) the construction of highways and other infrastructure. The military is said to promote entrepreneurial leadership qualities in its personnel, presumably scarce among civilian elites, particularly in developing countries. All of the aforementioned can be said to be true of Pakistan.

The contra-argument is that while military institutions do contribute to development, the net effect of military spending in the vast majority of underdeveloped countries has

been to retard development. A tractor contributes to the grain harvest and a teacher helps increase a country's human capital, in contrast a tank does not add anything to economic growth (except for its function as part of an "insurance policy" for the country). On the contrary, the tank is a burden that the economy must bear. Dwight D. Eisenhower, 34th U.S. President said, "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed." While Defence industries do contribute to economic growth in the developed world, developing countries that import arms manufactured in wealthier countries create a negative burden for their economies, particularly where debt is incurred to purchase arms. The great recession in the US through the 1930s only ended with the advent of World War II. Military spending generally has had a negative effect in developing countries that have no indigenous capacity.

Two opposing views have dominated the issue about defence burden viz (1) those who view defence expenditure as a burden on the economy of the country and would rather see greater appliance of resources to the economic sector, and (2) those who do not see any contradiction between defence, development and economic growth. The major challenge before the Third World countries is how to maintain a balance between national security needs on the one

hand and development and general welfare of the masses on the other. Since resources are scarce, defence effectiveness can only be enhanced at the expense of the other sectors of national well-being. It is paradoxical that the root causes of insecurity often development. Resources provided to the military and security sector due to

are tending to be increasingly non-conventional. Insecurity clearly impedes the development process and can destroy the benefits derived from years or even decades of development investments. The recent spate of terrorism attacks on "soft" targets has force-multiplied insecurity. Until there is security for the individual, and society at large,

state resources, fought by criminals and warlords with small arms, Afghanistan is a sorry example, alternating between the frying pan and the fire. Taken in the broader context, security must include eliminating the widespread availability of small arms whose supply is difficult to monitor and control. The following are counted among the

Training benefits: A large section of manpower from rural areas are shifted from subsistence to cash economy. Discipline and technical skills, which they receive during training, prepares them for the modern economy and a better life. Their contact with modern behaviour is transferred to their family members, relatives and village folk

external securities are necessary to provide a peaceful atmosphere for human progress, as well as economic activity. Defence can be ignored only at the risk of anarchy and destruction of the state.

Three of the Four Asian Tigers that have enjoyed sustained economic uplift, S. Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, have maintained large Armed Forces much beyond what their GNP could proportionately sustain. Despite these supposed albatrosses around their necks all three are outstanding models of the Asian economic miracle. The Defence Services also serve as an example of implementing accountability in a country where accountability is considered good enough for lip-service purposes only. The leaders of developing countries such as Pakistan must be encouraged by active accountability to recognise that assuming of office also involves responsibility to ensure that the powers of that office are used for the good of the citizens rather than misused for personal benefit. The laws of the land must be applied without fear or favour that is only possible where accountability in the Armed Forces is conducted through all its rank and file.

Pakistan, with vast needs of defence material, should have been far ahead in production of advanced weaponry and high-tech products within the country. However, an unholy cabal of commission agents acting on behalf of foreign manufacturers and in concert with local technical experts have effectively sabotaged in-country production on

one pretext or the other. Any time this country spends foreign exchange to purchase weapons and equipment, that allocation does become dead, economically speaking; by having indigenous production of the same, we not only save on the labour cost but divert the salary portion of the product to our own local blue and white collar workers while earning commensurate foreign exchange on the export content. Unfortunately for us it is almost impossible to get rid of the influence of some of these unscrupulous agents who do not hesitate to wine, dine and bribe plant men in authority to achieve their nefarious proposes, all under a veneer of vocal patriotism, sustained by an old-boy network that remains deliberately and culpably blind to the bribery and corruption. Factors that can contribute to the economy include a pragmatic and innovative cost-effective programme of economising by the Armed Forces themselves. It is well within our potential to force-multiply allocations for Defence Services into an economic asset rather than being a drag on the economy. Given the strait-jacket of the threat perception to our internal and external security, the Defence Services have a positive role to play in the economy. We must intelligently plan our arms and equipment purchases to ensure transfer of technology in such a way that an economic disadvantage becomes a major force-multiplier.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.