

Deficiencies in administration

It's time to remove the shortcomings

WE are happy to note the admission by the Prime Minister of the deficiencies in her administration in taking appropriate action in the wake of the bomb attack on SAMS Kibria. It follows comments of similar vein by another high placed minister to the effect that administrative failings have worked as one of the major impediments in unearthing the perpetrators of the recent bomb attacks. These comments, though belated and might we say somewhat guarded, are welcome even though it only states the obvious.

But we are frustrated even more by the recriminatory comments that fly around, both from the government as well as the opposition in the form of mutual blame for these dastardly attacks and deaths. Such statements have done nothing but preempt actions towards solving the problems as a consequence of these incidents.

Unsubstantiated statements emanating from the government high-ups purporting to blame others for an act of violence is out of order since such utterances only help in frustrating further action by the administration itself. Furthermore, coming from ministers of the government, such statements cannot but have serious implications and negative influence on those agencies that are expected to work with objectivity and neutrality to get to the bottom of these cases.

These admissions have not come a moment too soon. However, we feel that the government action must go beyond mere acknowledgement of the shortcomings into actually determining and undertaking specific actions to remove those. We are not sure the measures that the Prime Minister has mentioned being taken, can rid the administration of these deficiencies.

Much of the deficiencies are to do with the people in charge in various strata of the administration, right upto the top rungs. Much of the shortcomings will require attitudinal changes starting with our politicians and making sure that the various agencies are not influenced by direct or indirect political pressure.

It is very well that the police department and the intelligence agencies are getting the benefits of modern equipment and training and that 2000 officials of senior assistant secretary to sectary level will be sent abroad for training, but all this will be meaningless unless they are allowed to work without interference and with neutrality.

ADP not meeting target

Approval procedure needs revision

ONLY 29 percent of the current Annual Development Project (ADP) has been implemented according to the midterm review of the projects. It is not surprising considering the fact that not reaching the target is the rule rather than exception in our context. In fact that was one of the reasons why the finance minister had, last year, emphasised efficient and timely implementation of the projects. It seems that no one has paid any heed to his directives. The shortfall in the implementation rate has caused a drastic revision of the projects, to the extent that even dropping some of them for failing to utilise the funds allocated is being contemplated.

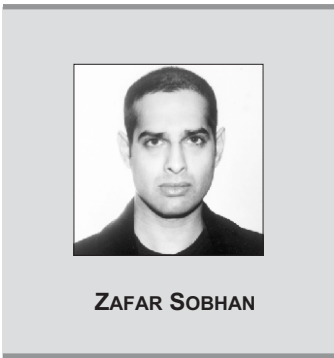
According to reports, some ministries could not spend anything whatsoever for the projects while some of the others utilised only a paltry amount in the first six months. This raises some pertinent questions in our minds. Firstly, how do projects that have no potential pass the process of approval in the first place? Secondly, what are the criteria to allocate funds for such projects after approval? If they are not feasible, then why approve and arrange funds for them at all? And lastly, what is the procedure to select such projects, which the ministries concerned do not take seriously at all?

There seems to be a gap between the approval and implementation process. If the ministries cannot implement the projects on schedule then there must be something wrong with project. Failure to utilise project funds will naturally have a negative impact on the donors' minds. To allay their fears, the government can reallocate the unutilised funds to those projects whose implementation has shown progress.

There have been concerns as well over some ADP projects being given green signals either on political consideration or under influence of members of parliament. We would like to urge the government to exercise caution in approving such projects to spare it the embarrassment over their non-implementation.

Timely implementation of ADP projects is an indicator of our project planning and management capacity. The current state of ADP implementation does nothing to prove that ability right.

Let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late



I have been out of the country for a few weeks which is why I am coming to the killing of Shah AMS Kibria so late. Nevertheless, I think that the tragic incident is of such importance and Mr. Kibria a person of such distinction that I cannot avoid writing about his assassination, even at this late date. His memory and the tectonic implications of his killing on the future of democracy in Bangladesh deserve at least this much.

I am pleased to note that in the past weeks we have seen eloquent and heartfelt appreciations of the man from many of those who had known him for decades and can do his memory far greater justice than I possibly could. I cannot add to the encomiums that have been bestowed upon him – that he was a faithful public servant, that rare breed of honest, decent, and trustworthy politician, and an intellect of rare perception and ability has been testified to in these pages as well as elsewhere.

In my all too brief encounters with Mr. Kibria I always found him to be genuinely encouraging and generous in a manner that came as quite a shock to this new face on the media landscape. That a man of his eminence would take the time to call me up on the phone to say nice things about pieces I had written that he appreciated is something that I will never forget. Not only that, but whenever we used to meet at forums such as seminars and dialogues, he always had a kind

word or two of advice for me. He was truly one of the most decent men that I have had the pleasure of knowing.

This wasn't meant to happen. Not again. Not after August 21. We all hoped that at the very least that incident would represent a watershed in our dealings with terrorism and the politics of conflict, but as we have now been reminded, nothing has changed. Six months later and we are burying yet another top leader of the opposition. The truly tragic thing is that this has become

certain section of the intelligentsia and perhaps the general public as well.

Newspapers and talk shows have been filled with comment about the foolishness of the AL for the hartal programme it has embarked upon in the wake of the killings (please recall that four others lost their life in Hobiganj alongside Mr. Kibria). There have been the by now typical complaints that the AL has been intransigent and uncooperative and is mining the tragedy for political gain. Excuse me?

when it was in power.

The repeated attacks on the AL are a legitimate issue.

The August 21 massacre was a terrifying moment for the country. The government on whose watch it occurred must bear some culpability. Has anyone resigned or been asked to resign due to the lapses in security that permitted the carnage? Has anyone been brought to justice for the crime? Has anyone been disciplined for failure to uncover anything at all in this most crucial of investigations? What

dissipate whatever sympathy and good will the AL had garnered as a result of the killing. Similarly, had the AL high command handled the situation a little more diplomatically, then it could have translated into great gains for the AL in terms of public support and credibility, and been good for the country as a whole.

Such a stance might even have had the effect of thawing relations between the government and opposition and helped further the various on-going investigations, attacks on the AL itself and send its goons into the street to beat demonstrators to jelly.

The consensus among the chattering classes seems to be that Hasina is the prime culprit when it comes to the detente between the two parties as she has been so intransigent in refusing to meet with the PM and sticking to the oppositional politics of hartal (despite the fact that the BNP was every bit as enamoured of hartals when it was in the opposition, with, one might add, considerably less cause than now).

I would like to suggest that the government under whose watch the opposition is being systematically decimated bears slightly more responsibility for the current breakdown in civility than the understandably confrontational posture of the leader of the opposition.

The problem seems to me to be that too many people simply refuse to see the truth of what is going on right in front of their eyes.

Their implacable hatred of the AL makes them blame the AL for everything, even when the AL is quite clearly the victim. They even make the preposterous suggestion that it is the AL itself that is behind the attacks. Most recently this was the rallying cry at a JCD meeting on the Dhaka University campus.

I suppose that we shouldn't expect any better from professional politicians and their paid sycophants. Upton Sinclair once wrote that "it is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it" and the entire existence of certain BNP leaders seems tied up in their demonisation of the AL and willingness to say things that even they know are not true.

But what about the rest of us? When are we going to look squarely at the problem of political terrorism in this country and state unequivocally that the time for self-serving and comforting falsehoods is over?

STRAIGHT TALK

Upton Sinclair once wrote that "it is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it" and the entire existence of certain BNP leaders seems tied up in their demonisation of the AL and willingness to say things that even they know are not true. But what about the rest of us? When are we going to look squarely at the problem of political terrorism in this country and state unequivocally that the time for self-serving and comforting falsehoods is over?

merely another chapter in the same old story of politics as usual in this benighted land of ours.

This is where we have come to as a nation. Mr. Kibria's death shocks and saddens but does not really surprise us. His death was tragic, but not altogether unexpected or inexplicable.

I think that the time is long overdue for us to face the facts squarely. Let us review the evidence of the past year. The killing of AL MP Ahsanullah Master on May 7. The massacre of August 21 that left 20 dead. The latest addition to our calendar of horrors: January 27.

It is now crystal clear -- as it should have been to anyone with eyes to see after August 21 -- that the AL high command is under serious threat. Someone is trying to wipe them out, or failing that, to intimidate them into silence.

But once again, as after August 21, the AL cannot catch a break from a

If the assassination of one of your top leaders on the watch of an administration either uncaring or incompetent to protect him is not an appropriate issue to mine for political gain, then what is?

It's pretty simple, really. It's one of three things.

One, the government is behind the attacks. I personally see no evidence of this and don't believe that this is the case.

Two, the government isn't behind the attacks, but knows who is, and is either unwilling or unable to rein them in.

Three, the government is absolutely clueless as to who could be behind the attacks.

Either way you slice it up, it is clear that the government has plenty to answer for and that the AL has reason to feel aggrieved. At the very least, the government has signally failed to protect them to the extent that the AL made sure the BNP high command was protected

about the massive arms haul of last April? Has any headway been made in that investigation? And now this?

The government has apparently failed to uncover a single meaningful clue with respect to the April 1 arms haul and the August 21 massacre and as a result another opposition leader lies dead. If this isn't evidence of monumental administrative ineptitude then I don't know what is.

In light of these massive failures, the carping about the folly of the AL calling hartals is almost farcical. So far as I can tell, almost as much has been written on the hartals now as on the killing of Mr. Kibria.

Now, of course, I too wish that the hartals hadn't been called. Hartals, to my mind, as I have written, serve no constructive purpose and only add to the miseries of the populace at an already tense time.

I also agree that the hartals were politically unwise as they helped to

though, frankly, I doubt that.

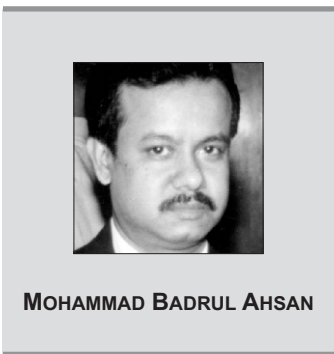
But never one to fail to capitalise on an opportunity, Sheikh Hasina has brilliantly hit upon the one tactic guaranteed to lessen support and sympathy for the AL even at this extremely sympathetic moment.

But let's get serious here. Hasina's political miscalculations are not the real issue.

The real issue is that the government is either unable or unwilling to get to the bottom of these terrorist attacks. Whether the government is behind the attacks, or is merely doing nothing to stop them, or doesn't have the faintest idea how to stop them is more or less a moot point. Any way you look at it, the government has a responsibility which it is not meeting. How long will we have to wait for some accountability?

What is needed is for the government to take some responsibility for its failures and not to blame the

Straws in the wind



I must be as prickly as the porcupines, because people get upset if I say anything. I know people, who draw fat salaries but cannot write a correct sentence. I know people who are religious but don't make an honest living. There are people, who look distinguished, but deep down inside rotten like anything. The world is full of contradictions, but nobody likes to talk about it.

I like to talk about it and people think I am critical. I like to talk in spades, white as white and black as black. But others don't see what I see. They live in a monochrome world, where it is a jaded boredom of gray. They don't believe in light and shadow. Everything is twilight for them.

Who is right here and who is wrong? Man is a creature of the darkness, conceived in it at birth and consigned to it in death. But he spends his life in the light of the world like a subway train crawling out on the surface. I want to open my eyes and look out in the sunlight. Others want to close their eyes and believe they are still passing through the tunnel.

In Samuel Butler's novel *Erewhon* it is said that illness is a crime, the more serious the illness

the heavier the sentence. Nehru once told his daughter Indira that he considered illness as a sin. The same Nehru later changed his mind and claimed that speaking about disease and illness should be forbidden by law, except in case of necessity. Even enlightened minds waver. Why blame the ordinary ones?

My hypothesis may strike you as odd, but nevertheless I would urge you to think. Man carries the darkness from the womb, which stays with him until he reaches the tomb. Hence, most men live in ignorance, because they

people, who are desperate, use false certificates, spend money, imitate others and have fluid personalities. They are the chameleons amongst us, believing in nothing but their own warped conviction that life is what fancy makes of it. They work hard to create the perception that the bottle is as good as the label.

Then come the portentous folks, people who do everything to show that they are so important. These are people, who toot their own horns, brag about pedigree, talk about money, children, friends and relatives. These people are like

the people who live and die in the humdrum of their existence.

But I mostly talk about other folks, the pathological people, who live under compulsions. They must lie, cheat, swagger, conspire, contradict and do other aberrations. These people are psychosomatic, their mind and body dogged by each other. They must deal, they must steal, they must conceal and they must kill.

All these people don't like if I talk about them. They don't like to hear about them as much as a drunk in the morning does not want to hear

about the night before. So I can't tell a politician that he is callous, a minister that he is corrupt, a bureaucrat that he is conspicuous, an intellectual that he is concupiscent, a businessman that he is contemptuous.

People get upset with me. They like to be praised, they like to be worshipped, from low to high, inverse of waterfall, from follower to leader, leader to financier, financier to kingmaker, priest to power, power to superpower. I like to talk about condescending people in the ascendancy of power, people who stoop low in order to go up in life. It beats me how they give away their essen-

tial dignity for recognition, advancement, and monetary gains and then having to cope with its shame.

Mikhail Lermontov, a Russian poet, described that of two close friends one is always the slave of another. Mankind has struggled for centuries to resolve that dilemma between friends, between communities, societies and countries. People have always tried to subjugate people in monarchies, autocracies, even in democracies. Oscar Wilde taunted that democracy meant simply the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people.

I talk about this new slavery, and it upsets people. They submit to the supremacy of other people, many to some, some to few, and then few to one, showing allegiance, obedience, servility, yesing to yes, naysaying to no. I talk about the rungs of the ladder, lower rung bound in servitude to the higher one, the equality of men ridiculed in this hierarchy, where every man puts the chain around his own feet and chooses his own master.

In the Russian society of the Middle Ages, feudal lords regularly exchanged slaves for animals, one human being for one horse or one dog. The Europeans and Americans

captured men, women and children in Africa and sold them as slaves in their own markets. People owned people in perpetuity, their lives, bodies, talents, spouses, children and dignity; people owned people line, hook and sink. Masters could do anything with their slaves, even take their lives without any accountability. In the Roman days, many slaves were gladiators, forced to fight and die in the arenas for the pleasure of the Roman citizens. Slavery goes back a long way in time.

The Florentine statesman and political philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli cautioned against the well-worn proverb: "He who builds on the people builds on mud." People build on people, and it has been the way of the world. Nobody likes if I talk about it. It makes them upset.

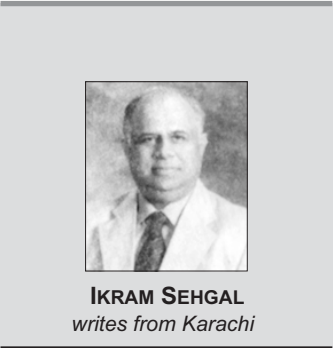
Civilizations rise and fall because they are built on people, hence built on mud. Slavery persists in human condition, either in body or in mind. Flattery, toadyism, servility, fawning, obsequiousness, sycophancy, these are many words with a single meaning. Infer from straws in the wind. Human spirit can soar in the sky or dip in the mud depending on what it does.

Right now it is rolling in the mud. In all its sophistication, it is the most unsophisticated thing. It is not loyalty, and it is not respect. It is the crass behaviour of a slave who has accepted his fate. If you want to know let me tell you the difference. Loyalty and respect are calls of duty for courageous people. Slavery is for the coward, weak, meek and greedy.

Touché! I suppose nobody is upset with me.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

The world at Davos



SYMBOLICALLY, but in a representative way that has no equal, the world assemblies at Davos, Switzerland during the last week of January every year. If you are not rubbing shoulders with the likes of former US President Bill Clinton and the British PM Tony Blair, then you are doing so with mediemen such as BBC's Nik Gowing and Stephen Cole, or Richard Quest of CNN. People like Microsoft's Bill Gates and Unysys's Narayan Murthy are regular attendees, so is Amre Moussa, former Foreign Minister of Egypt and Secretary General of the Arab League. Among the religious leaders you will find Mostafa Cerić of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Lord Carey of Clifton, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Many

Universities are well represented here, such as Harvard University's Joseph S. Nye Jr, Dean of the Kennedy School of Government, etc. Brainchild of Dr Klaus Schwab, the Geneva-based World Economic Forum (WEF) has its Annual Meeting at Davos, a unique gathering of leaders in almost every discipline -- heads of state and government, multi-national industrialists and businessmen, heads of world institutions and prominent NGOs, media persona, academics, and eminent personalities from many diverse fields, etc.

The theme for WEF Annual Meeting 2005 was "Taking Responsibility for Tough Choices" among the Co-Chairpersons were, viz (1) Bill Gates of Microsoft, USA, (2) Narayan Murthy of Unysys, India and (3) Lubna Olayan of Olayan Inc, UAE. Meant for networking and presentation of ideas, this year the Annual Meeting was devoted to better harnessing the collective intellect and decision-power of decision makers. A specially designed "Davos Workspace" allowed large groups of participants to work inter-actively, collaboratively and with creativity. Besides addressing the core of the global policy agenda, topics were meant to directly shape the corporate agenda. The Annual Meeting is famous for its innovative ideas, this

AS I SEE IT

No matter how many times one goes to Davos, and I have been there more than a dozen times in my private capacity, one is always surprised by something new and exciting, and in all fields, academics, commerce, science, literature, politics, finance, media etc. One cannot over-emphasise the importance of both official and unofficial delegations, not only at Davos but at Regional Summits, like the one planned in Jordan this May.

year it was the "Town Hall Meeting", held to evaluate, by the help of instant electronic voting, the priorities on the tough choices. About 900 people participated in the step-by-step discussions at 10-person roundtables followed by voting, a representative cross-section of the world's elite set the order of priorities. Update Session had included such diverse issues as (1) China, (2) climate change, (3) global economy, (4) Islam (5) poverty, (6) proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), (7) Middle East, (8) global trade, (9) US leadership, (10) Europe, (11) Global governance and (12) equitable globalisation. To those were added "Education" and "Health" because of the overwhelming preference of those taking part in the "Town Hall Meeting".

Among the global leaders who

addressed Plenary Sessions in the Congress Centre were, viz (1) British PM Tony Blair, (2) Former US President Bill Clinton, (3) President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, (4) President Olesegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, (5) Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz of Pakistan, (6) Prime Minister Ahmed Mahmood Nazif of Egypt, (7) President Benjamin William Mpaka of Tanzania, (8) President Yushchenko of Ukraine, (9) Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey, etc. As at the last minute he could not make it to Davos, President Jacques Chirac of France addressed the assembled dignitaries electronically from the Elysee Palace in Paris. Taking part in various sessions were, viz (1) Wu Jiamin from China, (2) Gen Wesley Clark of USA, (3) Minister Ali

Babacan from Turkey, (4) Rahul Bajaj of India (5) Minister Rashid M Rashid of Egypt, (6) Vice-PM of Israel Shimon Peres, (7) Thomas Friedman of USA, (8) Carly Fiorina of USA, (9) Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah of Afghanistan, (10) Senator Bill Frist of USA, (11) Paul Coelho of Brazil and, (12) George Soros of USA, etc.

Pakistani President Gen Pervez Musharraf was outstanding in presenting Pakistan's viewpoint in 2004, he talked not in one forum but several in the course of three short days at Davos. A comparable Presidential (or PM's) foreign foray would have taken 60-75 days of his time, cost about 10-15 times more. The President not only had a chance to present the Pakistani foreign policy and economic agenda to a diverse audience, but it also gave him an

invaluable insight into how such people shape world policies. As for Gen Musharraf, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz's Breakfast meeting at 7:30 am in the Belvedere Salon of the Hotel Steigenberger attracted over 200 guests despite the morning freeze.

Among the dignitaries present were Secretary General Amre Moussa of the Arab League, Gareth Evans of ICC, Peter Eigen of Transparency International, National Security Advisor of Iraq Dr Mowaffak Al Rubaie, a whole clutch of Indian tycoons including Dhruv Sawhney, the Bajajs, the Godrejs, Ajit Gulabchand, etc BBC's Nik Gowing and Stephen Cole, Trudy Rubin of Philadelphia Enquire, Lally Ann Weymouth of Time Magazine, former US Ambassador to Pakistan, Wendy Chamberlan, now Deputy

Chief UNHCR, etc. Shaukat Aziz gave an eloquent presentation about Pakistan economically and politically, followed by an extensive Q&A Session.

Pakistan had a very strong official delegation including the Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri, Minister for Privatisation and Investment Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, Minister for Commerce Humayun Akhtar, Minister for Industries Jahangir Tareen and Minister for IT. Among the senior Pakistani media present were Mahmood Shaam of Jang, Zia Shahid of Khabrain, etc. A veteran of the WEF Annual Meetings at Davos, the PM ensured that his Ministers utilised the occasion for useful networking with their counterparts as well as potential investors in Pakistan.

Compared to other countries the Pakistani private businessmen contingent was small, Mian Mansha of Mansha Group (and MCB) and Hussain Dawood of Dawood Group being the only private participants (constituting owners) other than myself. Other than the official delegation, only those paying their way through their own pockets, rather than those enjoying themselves on a holiday jaunt on corporate funds, can benefit from Davos. More Pakistani entrepreneurs should become members of WEF to

increase Pakistan's visibility. The presence of Arif Naqvi of Abraaj Capital, UAE, was a wonderful and exciting exception to the norm. Doing business par excellence abroad, his presence was not only a matter of pride for Pakistanis but a refreshing presence for young Pakistani entrepreneurs, a model for successful corporate excellence that needs not only to be emulated but eulogised.

No matter how many times one goes to Davos, and I have been there more than a dozen times in my private capacity, one is always surprised by something new and exciting, and in all fields, academics, commerce, science, literature, politics, finance, media etc. One cannot over-emphasise the importance of both official and unofficial delegations, not only at Davos but at Regional Summits, like the one planned in Jordan this May. One can also hope that more and more Pakistani entrepreneurs will join the WEF to ensure Pakistan has a much more effective presence.

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