

# Pope John Paul II : A tribute Use and abuse of bureaucracy

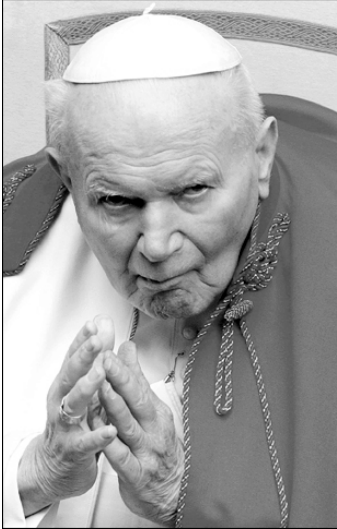
ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

AT the age of 84 Pope John Paul II is dead. As his health deteriorated and the whole world's attention was focused on the two lighted rooms of the Vatican, the Pope decided to 'return to his maker' in a serene manner. Thus last Sunday the Mass that was performed in the Vatican, was not conducted by the Pope for the first time in 26 years.

With 26 years of his Papacy, he is the third longest reigning Pope. His Papacy will be remembered for a long time and by millions of people around the world. He was the spiritual head of one billion Catholics around the world. He could thus go to any country of the world and find Catholics and non Catholics alike flocking to him. He has traveled 30 times the circumference of the earth and has visited 129 countries. It has been rightly said that he went out to reach the world and at his death 'the world came to him'. The out-pourings at the Vatican as he neared death has been permanently etched in human minds. The number of countries which have declared national mourning are many and flags have been lowered in many more countries to honour his memory.

The Pope was born and grew up in Krakow in Poland and as an adolescent has seen the full rigors of Hitler's Germany. He is being credited as having brought down Communism and triggered the fall of the Berlin Wall leading to the reunification of Germany. The fall of Communism is not only because Pope John Paul II as newly elected Pope in 1978 went to Warsaw and held Mass. Indeed the Pope the first to be elected outside anybody from Italy after 455 years and the first one from Poland, had a profound impact on the deeply Catholic Poland. We must not forget the role of the 'Solidarity' leader Lech Walesa, who carried his banner of reviving the workers movement in Poland and thus sent a danger signal to Moscow. The fall of Communism is too vast a subject to be treated here. Suffice it to say that the fall of Communism is primarily due to the collapse of the vast economic system built within the Soviet Union and around the world. The Pope had a deep love for his birth place and visited his native coun-

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try as Pope nine times.

In the day of global and instantaneous communication, Pope John Paul II used the media to perfection. He reached every nook and corner of the earth and had an earthy manner about him. He communicated with the young and the old, people of all walks of life, men and women, with perfect ease. He was the target of frequent assassinations. In 1981 one deranged Turk Mehmet Ali Agca shot at him and nearly killed him. Agca was caught and finally the Pope forgave him. He had to use what came to be known as Papamobil, a car with a glass top and the Pope was visible. As he crisscrossed the world his Papamobil traveled with him. There is no leader, political or spiritual, with a higher profile than the Pope. The Pope established

diplomatic relations with Israel and Palestine and visited both. He is the first Pontiff to preach at a Protestant church, visit a synagogue and a mosque. He took moral positions and refused to support President George Bush's invasion of Iraq.

The Vatican has entered a 9-day mourning from 3 April. The 117 Cardinals will start arriving for the Conclave to select a successor for Pope John Paul II. The exercise is expected to last between 15 and 20 days. In the dark chambers of the Vatican, it has been rumoured that Pope John Paul II, in order to continue his legacy, had stacked the Cardinals, mainly of his own choice. The choice of a Pope is a difficult affair as there is no clear cut guide line for this. No doubt jockeying for this prestigious position has begun and in the end of it all people will crane their necks towards the chimney of the Sistine Chapel to find that the white smoke is at last visible. The white smoke is the signal that there is a new Pope. In the tradition bound Vatican this is unlikely to change.

The legacy of Pope John Paul II will undoubtedly be that he is the first Pope to take the hide bound Vatican in the truly modern age. Short of landing on the Moon the Pope went everywhere. Yet he will be remembered as a rather inflexible Pope. He held on firmly to the traditionalist view on contraception, abortion, married priests and women clergy. He has been severely chastised by a whole array of opinion around the world. He has been criticised that in Europe church going has greatly fallen due to his inflexible views. As a matter of fact Catholicism is flourishing in Latin America and Africa. And in Africa Christianity is competing with Islam although Islam does not have a religious hierarchy.

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ABDUL KHALEQUE

RATIONALISATION of government's size has come into focus at the behest of donor countries and organisations in the main. Bangladesh has got too many ministries, each with a huge lot of unnecessary officers and clerical staff in all the tiers, resulting in high recurring administrative cost and low output of work. The other day, we saw in newspapers that more than one hundred joint secretaries were waiting for promotion as additional secretaries. It is not yet clear what such a big lot of additional secretaries will do. They may be placed in the prospective district and divisional councils as secretary in the decentralisation scheme. For want of proper monitoring of the performance of employees, there is inadequacy of dedication and energetic effort in the performance of prescribed duties. Late arrival at office and early departure therefrom have become the hall-mark of attendance scenario in most of the public offices and government controlled corporate offices.

There are too many annual holidays, apart from hartals, strikes, trade union in-fights, trade union elections and associated campaigns. Viewed in light of what has been in practice, effective and actual work hour in office is lamentably low in Bangladesh. Another lamentable scenario is that money has been lavishly spent on telephones, motor car, expensive screens and a lot of other paraphernalia in offices and residences of executive and legislative high-ups. The entire situation on the above counts has no relativity with the constraints of the money factor. Bangladesh as one of the top resource-poor countries expends money lavishly in order to make a show to others. The grabbing of cars of departments by political and civil

service bureaucrats is really a scam.

One may notice the over-all lack of punctuality in the rank and file of the citizens as a whole, irrespective of their identity as officials (public or private) or in any other areas of life where punctuality is most needed. Amongst other things, this lack of a sense of punctuality is obviously transparent. In recent years, we talked a lot about transparency in administration in broad terms, without caring to ponder that everything in a government cannot ensure openness. As we know, transparency is comprehensive and sincere openness built up on the free flow of infor-

explain how it must be done so that the public can understand government actions, and ponder over them. It is believed that corrupt practices thrive in secrecy; and so, open and accountable government is essential to check it. It is also believed that government must be open to the scrutiny and question of the people or their representatives in parliament. The legislature is expected to ensure that the executive organ and its tentacles satisfactorily implement programme of action duly adopted by parliament.

The world over, government operates through secretariat to deal

included all cadre, non-cadre and subordinate ranks who perform specialised as well as routine works in a ministry, regardless of political changes, remaining meticulously outside the domain of politics. This is the general pattern in an ideal, developed democracy.

Civil servants are certainly required to keep the wheel of the governmental machinery going and act as agents for fulfilment of the policy of the political party in office. They are the repository of principles and practices of administrative management which endures while government comes and goes. Their

formulation for cabinet or a legislative bill, the preparatory work is in great part the result of influence exerted by the secretary and his relevant colleagues. It may be remembered that most modern statutes are, in fact, skeleton legislations, because of shortage of time of the legislators to devote to so many bills, and the complexities of the subjects, or inadequacy of knowledge of complexities etc. Legislators, therefore, legislate in general terms only, empowering in the statute the ministry concerned to work out the detailed regulations necessary to give full effect to the statute. The rules and regulations so made in the ministry have the force of law. In the application of such rules and regulations to specific cases the executive often assumes quasi-judicial role. In the administration of public service, innumerable kinds of judicial and quasi-judicial functions arise particularly in matters which affect the individual welfare of large sectors of the community. In a modern democratic government, legislatures delegate a certain broad rule-making authority to the administration and authority is conferred upon the administration to adjudicate controversies. This pattern of delegated legislation and adjudication calls for a very high quality of personnel, political as well as civil service, in the administration.

A civil servant in exercise of his democratic right to vote, may even cast his vote against the party which rules at the relevant time. He is called upon to implement the policy of the party and very clearly he is duty-bound to do so, as he is not a ruler by himself but a public servant.

Abdul Khaleque is a former IG of Police.

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mation to determine responsibility for failure, incompetence etc. It is argued by a lot of protagonists of transparency that national leaders and government officials at all levels must encourage independent inspection agencies to audit and control their finances. In their view, in absence of such inspection, the society cannot be considered as clean and economic benefits cannot reach the common people. The transparency theme is undoubtedly the core of good governance but it cannot be achieved by laying open office secrets and records for inspection as visualised.

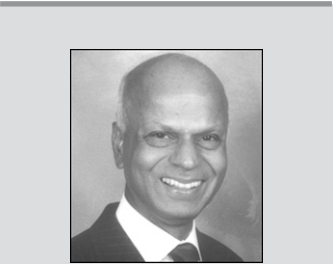
Modern administration literature has laid great emphasis on accountability which, by and large, aims to inform the public about reasons why government action is taken, and to

with multifarious responsibilities. The secretary to the government in any particular ministry is the key person to help his political head with utmost efficiency, knowledge, experience, sincerity, skill and honesty. For good governance in a ministry, a good secretary, all his colleagues down below and a capable, good minister are essential factors in a government headed by a good, honest and capable leader. Doubtlessly, an ideal secretary is called the brain-trust of a minister who in many instances is likely to be amateur in the art of administration and management. Other high ranking officers in a ministry, indeed, constitute the bastion to symbolise the over-all good governance of the ministry. The non-political agents of administration make up the civil services which

rigid neutrality in the party political issues is the first code of their official conduct and they are to serve with equal fidelity whatever may be the complexion of the government. All civil servants, indeed, owe a temporary allegiance to the party in power and its programmes, no matter what their bias or personal conviction. "The first thing," observed Viscount Attlee, "a Minister finds on entering office is that he can depend absolutely on the loyalty of his staff, and on leaving office, he will seldom be able to say what the private political views are even of those with whom he has worked most closely."

The ministry in a democracy must answer for its administration to the public and the legislature. This is accountability which must be rational. In matters of drawing up policy

## Glimpses of a lost civilisation



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM writes from Madrid

IN 1998, I wrote an article on the American Indians who, before European colonisation, lived in the Great Plains of North America. The Great Plains cover a vast area stretching from Rio Grande in the south to the Mackenzie River delta in the north and Rocky Mountains in the west. These native Americans were conveniently branded as wild savages and then virtually exterminated without any compunction by the Anglo-Saxon colonisers. My article was published in the Daily Star of 19th June, 1998 under the title of

Mexico and South-eastward to central America. At about this time in Monte Alban, a few dozen miles to the west of San Lorenzo, another Meso-American group, the Zapotecs, invented writing of the most elaborate character (they did not get any help from Mesopotamia) and produced a written calendar. They also started building temple-pyramids, colossal sculptures and great ceremonial centres to worship their gods and to honour their dead rulers. Anyone who visits La Venta or San Lorenzo can visit the ruins of some of these impres-

The exact origin of the Mayan people is unknown. Some believe that they were Olmecs, who had fled to the west after the collapse of San Lorenzo. Others think that they came from other Mayan centres like Peten in Guatemala and settled in Belize, Campeche and Yucatan. Be that as it may, it was at this time that the Mayans produced the most advanced Meso-American civilisation of its time, which lasted for a thousand years, during which period important city-states like Nakabe, El Mirador, Tikal, Copan, Uxmal,

sculpture, etc., the fields in which the Mayans excelled most were mathematics and astronomy. The priests, besides being religious leaders, were also brilliant mathematicians and astronomers. It took us in the Asian-European civilisation so many centuries to invent Zero. Neither the ancient Greeks, nor the Romans, nor the Iranians had any knowledge of the Zero. It was the Arabs who invented Zero, the decimal system and algebra in the twelfth century. (The Indians of Asia also claim to have invented zero and the decimal system.) But the Mayans had invented positional numeration and zero long before us. According to Prof. J.M. Roberts of Merton College, Oxford, "Through the calendar, enough of Maya thinking can be grasped to make it evident that this people's religious leaders had an idea of time much vaster than that of any other civilisation of which we have knowledge; they calculated an antiquity of hundreds of thousands of years. They may even have arrived at the idea that time has no beginning". They also conceived the idea of time being eternal and like the Zurvanites – a version of Zoroastrianism – of third century Iran, worshipped time.

Mayan political structure was based on alliances among city-states which were governed by local rulers. By the eleventh century, either due to shortage of food, peasant uprising or inter-tribal fighting or a combination of these factors, Mayan political order had declined. It lingered on for several centuries. By the end of the sixteenth century, when the Spaniards arrived on the coasts of Yucatan, there were still important city-states like Tulum, Tayasal, Uxmal and Ixmiqué, many of which after prolonged siege and subsequent massacres were captured and their people subjugated by the invaders. Others collapsed from within. Thus the once brilliant Mayan civilisation reached its tragic end.

## LETTER FROM EUROPE

Deconstructing the Savage Indian Myth.

Many years ago, during my student days in Spain, I met some descendants of Meso-American Indians and was impressed by their intelligence and warmth. Meso-America is also a vast territory which consists of most of southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, parts of Honduras and El Salvador. I had wanted to write a similar article on the Meso-American Indians but did not get an opportunity to travel to this area until last winter. What I found was truly fascinating – thousands of miles away from the other centres of ancient civilisation like Mesopotamia, Egypt, China and India, a group of isolated people had developed writing, art, architecture, mathematics and astronomy.

The ancestors of the Meso-Indians, like the Plains Indians were of Mongoloid origin and crossed into North America from Asia through the Bering straits, many centuries ago. While the Plains Indians were essentially a nomadic people and hunters, the Meso-Americans, with the rise of atmospheric temperature around 7000 BC gave up hunting and started becoming agriculturists. However, their agricultural technique remained rather rudimentary – they used to burn and clear the land to use it for two or three seasons and then abandon it for a time. They did not have any ploughs either. In spite of this rudimentary technique, gradually over centuries, they learnt how to grow maize, beans, squashes, chilli peppers and cotton. With the consolidation of agriculture as the primary means of subsistence, the Meso-Americans started living in large settled communities like villages and towns by the waterways and developed a simple peasant-like culture. The villagers knew how to weave simple cloth and make pottery. These villages were economically self-sufficient and most probably had an egalitarian social order.

But around 1200 BC, along the southern Gulf coast of Mexico, near the modern towns of San Lorenzo and La Venta, there rose a civilisation called the Olmec civilisation, which could easily be compared with that of Mesopotamia. Ceramics and pottery became more and more sophisticated. Great artistry was devoted to Jade, producing fine carvings of figures. Wood carvings developed, although most of them have now unfortunately disappeared because of extreme humidity. Some important pieces like the huge wooden lintels of Tikal, Guatemala have luckily survived. Villages developed into fairly large towns as in the "fertile crescent" of Mesopotamia. A class-structured and centralised society emerged. A land-owning class, took control of the most fertile cultivable lands. The serfs performed menial tasks. A merchant class established trade routes with other Meso-American areas – north-westward, towards the valley of

sive monuments, especially the human heads of giant proportions. These are made of stone and some of them weigh more than 40 tons. It is worth mentioning here that the Meso-Americans carried out these building projects without neither draught animals nor the wheel.

What extraordinary circumstances gave rise to such a brilliant civilisation? Tropical climate, plenty of rainfall, rich alluvial soil deposited for centuries, abundant food supply and relative social peace were probably the main reasons for such high level of intellectual activity for such a prolonged period. The Olmecs worshipped several deities like the fire god, rain god, corn god, feathered serpent and of course, a deity which was half animal and half human – a hybrid between jaguar and human infant. Whatever architectural site I visited in this area, the presence of this hybrid deity in different shapes and forms was immediately visible. Most impressive of them was, in my opinion, the Jaguar throne buried inside the huge pyramid at Chichen Itza in Yucatan.

No one is exactly sure as to why the Olmec civilisation at San Lorenzo and La Venta declined, but around 400 BC, the Olmec tradition was picked up by the Mayan people in the west.

Chichen Itza, Mayapan and many others rose, prospered, expanded and then fell. Highly complex architectural monuments of enormous size like temples, observatories, tombs, pyramids, palaces, rectangular ball courts were built.

By the way, this game must have been very popular among the Meso-American elite because the courts could accommodate thousands of spectators. Special places were reserved for the rulers. The ball was made of solid rubber and used to move fast. The players had to be very agile. Unlike present-day football or volleyball, the Mayan ball could not be touched by hand or foot but with the hip. Therefore, leather padding on the heap was absolutely essential. I visited several of these courts. I must say, I was quite impressed by their architectural design. But my enthusiasm somewhat waned when examining some of the reliefs on the walls of the courts, I found that the captain and several players of the losing side had their penises pierced or heads cut off. The early Mayans were a peaceful people but at a later stage, under the influence of Toltecs, who came from the valley of Mexico, warfare and sacrifices for divine favour became quite common.

Leaving aside art, architecture,

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