

Government's 'yes' to free press welcome

It will help effective governance

We are heartened by the fact that the interim government has clarified its position against the backdrop of misgivings arising out of certain restrictions having been put on the media that it will not interfere with the free functioning of the press. We have a sigh of relief along with the readers of newspapers at home and abroad. We commend the Chief Adviser to the Caretaker Government and the Information Adviser for the promptitude and sensitivity with which they have responded to the concerns of the press and taken a positive and enlightened stance on the issue of free flow of information in the country.

That whatever the media had to say in defence of free press when confronted with a prospect of so-called restrictions sank in the mind of the caretaker government is an extremely good augury. There was no need for placing any 'fetters' on the press, especially when the change over to the state of emergency found broad support from the media as an inevitable development opening a window of opportunity.

The fleeting injudicious step may have raised an apprehension, however, that there are elements who are not in sync with the Chief Adviser or the Adviser for Law. As part of the damage control exercise or heralding a consultative process, the government is to meet with media representatives on the issue soon. This is a good idea; for, there should be no communication gap between the interim government and the press, the latter catering to the thirst for information among the people. Independent press is a bridge between the government and the people. The freer the media better served is the government.

The media for its part must not only be wedded to responsible journalism but also be seen to be performing as such. It has to scrupulously avoid any lack of objectivity. From our side, we must rise to the occasion refraining from sensationalism of any kind or from playing to the gallery. The freedom that we seek and hold so dear must also be protected from our own excesses.

IGP's resolve to catch godfathers

Arrest is not enough, convict them

THE new Inspector General of Police has said that the law enforcers will give the godfathers a hot chase. People have welcomed the on-going countrywide drive against crime, but they would like to see the godfathers, who orchestrate all criminal activities, arrested and brought to justice. In fact, the godfathers are responsible for the abysmal slide in law and order witnessed in the recent years and no crackdown on criminals would succeed unless their mentors are taken into the dragnet.

The law enforcers should also begin legal action against the extortionists, encroachers, and musclemen who apparently set up a parallel administration in some places and resorted to plundering and looting of national assets. A few days back the law enforcers demolished a market built by a well-known godfather on an illegally occupied riverbank. The demolition was no doubt necessary to recover the land, but the encroachers must be brought to justice as well.

It is highly regrettable that the godfathers operate under the protective umbrella of this or that political party, or are themselves political activists. The situation is further aggravated when they belong to the ruling party. The ruling party or alliance doesn't usually find it difficult to influence the administration and allow the loyal elements to commit all sorts of crimes. People in general are reduced to helpless onlookers under such circumstances.

This drive should be particularly embarrassing to the immediate past ruling party as its leaders can now see what they have left for us. Unfortunately, the other parties cannot also claim to have a better track record when it came to keeping criminals out of their folds.

We hope the anti-crime drive will not be a seasonal affair. Or just showcase the high number of hoodlums apprehended. The arrested godfathers must be prosecuted and conviction handed out to them so that they effectively neutralised. No innocent should be a victim.

Terrorists' godfathers



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

Through his admission, he has exposed the extent that the agencies were made to work as an instrument of the party in power rather than that of the state, to the detriment of national interest. And when we have officers holding high position unable or unwilling to resist political pressure in performing their national duties then we have a very dangerous combination. The result is before us.

backed up by the statements of the two main accused, who have been convicted in the blasts cases and are awaiting execution, made to the investigators.

The report has come at a time when a special drive is on against criminals and holders of illegal weapons by joint forces under. The caretaker government should take the report, which links at least eight senior members of the BNP to Sheikh Abdur Rahman and Siddiqui Islam, seriously.

It must be done for the sake of our national security and to disprove the allegations of Bangladesh being deluged by Islamic terrorists and becoming a future hub of terrorism in the region.

It is important to realise the grave security threat that our nation was exposed to particularly after the events of August 24, 2004 and August 17, 2005.

In the wake of 9/11 there was an offensive to paint some countries as 'hotbeds of terrorism' and 'exporter of Islamic radicalism.' Bangladesh was one such country, which was accused of exporting Islamic terrorism to its neighbour.

There is no ground to doubt the veracity of the report since it is

hours and the spate of bombings, particularly in 2004 and 2005 were cited to validate the arguments.

Sponsored writings by western authors, like that of Selig Harrison, were used to certify the assertions of some of the Indian commentators. Imagination of some Indian analysts flew unbound to establish a link between the Islamic radicals in Bangladesh and an entire book was written to show that Bangladesh was the next Afghanistan.

While such writings found widespread circulation, those that attempted to refute such assertions drew very little attention, if at all.

While it has been our contention that groups like the JMB had their ideological moorings in the ideological philosophy of the international Islamic terrorist organisation, there was not enough evidence to suggest a direct support of al-Qaeda to the indigenous Islamic radicals in Bangladesh.

However, there were grounds to believe the existence of a link between a religious political party

and the Bangladesh Islamic radicals.

What we have been calling upon the immediate past government to go into was the extent and scope of any external linkage, if only to preclude its possibility as well as to expose the local sponsors of these groups, if any.

If the media was highly critical of the previous government's handling of the issue the answer perhaps lies in the very recent newspaper report.

The caretaker government must investigate the report in all seriousness. Not only this, but perhaps there is a need to reinvestigate the blast cases particularly the ones that were directed against the British High Commissioner, Mr. Kibria, and of course the attack on the AL meeting on August 21, 2004.

Not only have some of the investigations remain uncompleted, there is every reason to believe that the investigations were influenced by political considerations, particularly in the light of the revelations made in the recent Prothom Alo report.

officers received patronage from the AL government of 1996-2001.

Similarly, the bureaucrats recruited during the rule of CMLA and President Ziaur Rahman were rewarded by the BNP government (1991-1996) and the BNP-led alliance government (2001-2006) through accelerated promotions and prized postings at home and abroad.

Second, chairmen and members appointed to the PSC on political consideration during the periods of the BNP governments and the AL government in the past 15 years mostly failed to withstand the pressure of the party/alliance in power for recruiting candidates on political considerations to cadre and non-cadre posts.

These civil servants have become staunch supporters of either of these two major parties that patronized their recruitment to civil service.

Third, during the past fifteen years rule of the BNP and the AL, the criteria for promotion to the mid-level and senior-level posts in the Secretariat, commonly known as the seat of the government, were changed several times on political consideration primarily to suit promotion of a particular batch or group of the bureaucrats loyal to the party in power.

When a reasonably neutral bureaucrat found that that promotion was made not on the basis of merit, impartiality and honesty but on political considerations, then he discreetly sided with either of these two major political parties and often with the party in power.

Fourth, many civil servants succumbed to political pressure or indulged in partisan politics to hide their inefficiency and corruption.

Fifth, the Public Servants (Retirement) Act-1974 empowers the government to retire a public servant without assigning any reason on his/her completion of 25 years of service.

This act hangs like the Sword of Damocles over the heads of the mid-level and senior bureaucrats. During the past thirty years or so,

there are no political constraints imposed on him, there being no political government in place currently.

Through his admission, he has exposed the extent that the agencies were made to work as an instrument of the party in power rather than that of the state, to the detriment of national interest. And when we have officers holding high position unable or unwilling to resist political pressure in performing their national duties then we have a very dangerous combination. The result is before us.

The ULFA revelations must be investigated seriously. Without going into the analysis of the statements of Pallab Saikia, the ULFA activist, the Bangladeshi governments must undertake an investigation into the alleged connections of the ULFA with certain elements in our country, again if nothing else than to disprove such a link.

Now that we have a government composed of persons of integrity and having the confidence and support of the people, and the interest of the country being their only motivation, we can hope that the law enforcing agencies will not be constrained in their work.

Not only do we hope that they would nab the godfathers but that they would also be able to conduct a thorough investigation into all these incidents so that these cases are resolved once and for all. We should also not hesitate to seek assistance of our friends in the investigation of these cases.

We should also not be unduly worried if foreign links are exposed. These will only help us in combating the problem more effectively. The only stake should be the interest of the country.

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Striking at root of problem in administration



M ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

BARE FACTS

Who will save the honest, upright and impartial bureaucrats when the CTG hands over power to a political party or political alliance that wins the next general election? I have no doubt that whichever of the two major political parties or political alliances that goes to form the government after winning the election will behave in the way they did while in power in the past fifteen years.

examinations.

The recruitment system is tilted towards quotas. Only 45 percent are recruited on the basis of merit and the rest on district and other quota basis. As a result, less meritorious candidates get preference over meritorious ones.

Second, Public Service Commission (PSC), which is responsible for conducting tests and examinations for the selection of suitable candidates for appointment to the service of the republic has, on many occasions, failed to withstand the pressure of the party in power to recommend appointment of candidates to various cadres in BCS cadres on political consideration.

The situation worsened in the nineties and reached an all-time high in the immediate past BNP-led alliance rule.

Third, many officers appointed to various cadres in the BCS do not have proper knowledge of English language. As a result of their poor knowledge in English language, they find it difficult to efficiently handle cases like correspondence with foreign countries and development partners, preparing projects to be financed by the development partners and negotiating with them terms and conditions for financing such projects, representing the government in inter-governmental meetings and in regional and international bodies.

Fourth, retirement of officers of the last batch of erstwhile Central Superior Services of Pakistan and East Pakistan Civil Service from the senior and top echelons of the

administration and filling up their positions with BCS officers having comparatively less experience has created a gap of efficient and effective officers in the administration.

It is a fact that corruption is not a new phenomenon in Bangladesh. But, what is important is that corruption has become pervasive in public administration of the country.

The important causes for pervasive corruption in the administration may be as follows:

Firstly, there has been a serious degradation in moral and ethical values in the society. Many people do not care to distinguish between good and bad while amassing wealth.

There is no social resistance to corruption. Society's reticence and/or condoning corruption has encouraged further corruption.

Secondly, low salary package, economic insecurity, lure for procuring luxurious amenities of life, shortcomings in government system and procedure, lack of access to information regime etc. make a civil servant corruptible.

Private corporate sector and others in business take advantage of low pay package of civil servants and resorts to illegal methods such as, rewarding the concerned officials for business gains.

Thirdly, ambition for joining politics immediately after retirement leads many senior civil servants to earn huge money

through corrupt practices to give money to the political party of his choice for securing nomination and to contest elections to become MPs.

Fourthly, ineffectiveness of the organization such as Anti-Corruption Commission and the defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption to take action against corrupt civil servants has encouraged many other civil servants to be corrupt.

An analyst writes: "A person is corrupt because it is profitable to be so. If a person perceives that the risk of being punished is larger than the profit earned, he is less likely to be corrupt. If the reward of being honest is lower than that of the punishment, the propensity to be corrupt would be higher."

This is equally true for the civil servants.

Bangladesh has inherited the civil service system introduced by the British in the sub-continent. Like Britain, Bangladesh should naturally have politically neutral civil servants.

But the ground realities are different. Most civil servants are divided into two camps following the two main political parties, the BNP and the AL. The question is: why?

First, the bureaucrats recruited by the AL government immediately after independence from amongst the freedom fighters without properly going through the procedure inherited by the PSC of Bangladesh from the erstwhile CPSC of Pakistan and EPSC of East Pakistan came to be identified as pro-AL. Most of these

hundreds of civil servants had fallen victim to this act.

The BNP-led alliance government broke all the past records of retiring civil servants on political considerations under this act. Thus, many mid-level and senior-level civil servants bureaucrats had sided in the past and will continue to side in the future with the party in power to save their job as well as to get contractual appointment on retirement.

Chief Adviser Fakhrudin Ahmed is reminding the top bureaucrats that no political party is their master and they are the servants of the republic sounds well. But, do the ground realities speak so?

Who will save the honest, upright and impartial bureaucrats when the CTG hands over power to a political party or political alliance that wins the next general election? I have no doubt that whichever of the two major political parties or political alliances that goes to form the government will behave in the way they did while in power in the past fifteen years.

We have to strike at the root of problems in the administration. The CTG will render yeoman's service if it can: (1) depoliticize the appointments in the PSC and other constitutional bodies through a constitutional council; (2) depoliticize appointments of chairmen and commissioners in the Anti-Corruption Commission and empower it with necessary powers to fight out corruption in all spheres of national life, including the bureaucracy; (3) repeal the Public Servants (Retirement) Act, 1974; and (4) make legal provision disqualifying public servants from contesting national elections within three years of their retirement.

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surveillance plane in the colours of the United Nations in hopes of drawing fire or assassinating Saddam."

Mr. Blair considers himself as a moralist. It is difficult for me to reconcile his supposedly high moral standards with the vile method used by him and Bush to portray Iraq as a threat to world security and then invade it on false pretences.

Mr. Blair also talks incessantly about fighting for western values. I have my doubts as to whether history will judge him as a great defender of western values or as someone who brought shame to those values.

This misbegotten illegal war has not only brought untold misery to millions but also undermined the security of his country. Mr. Blair is a slick, silver-tongued debater but to argue that British participation in the invasion of Iraq has made Britain safer or that it had nothing to do with the London bombings is an insult to anybody's intelligence.

Mistrust of Blair's foreign policy goes far beyond Britain's Muslim minority of 1.6 million. Most British citizens are in total disagreement with Blair's foreign policy. They

despise Blair's total identification with Bush's White House.

In a poll in mid-August, 2006 more than eight out of ten Britons said that Britain should split from the United States in America's so-called war on terror. According to Reginald Dale of Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies: "Many normally sober members of the British elite are incandescent with rage that Bush and Blair, as they see it are turning the Middle East into an even more lethal powder keg, endangering their own lives and those of their families."

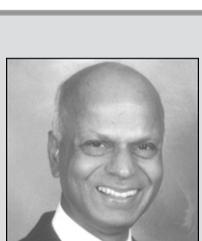
Luckily, Mr. Blair will be out of office by this summer. It is quite likely that Mr. Brown will be his successor as the prime minister.

In a recently published article on security matters in the Guardian, Mr. Brown hinted that there will be significant changes in British foreign policy after Mr. Blair's departure.

While paying lip service to Britain's "special relationship" with the United States, Mr. Brown will most probably distance himself militarily from Bush's policy of waging open-ended conflicts all over the world.

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The Blair doctrine



LETTER FROM EUROPE

"The frontiers of our security no longer stop at the Channel. What happens in the Middle East affects us. What happens in Pakistan, or Indonesia, or in the attenuated struggles for territory and supremacy in Africa for example, in Sudan or Somalia -- the frontiers of our security are global."

CHAKLADEE MAHBOOB-UL ALAM
writes from Madrid

MOST world leaders, who are worried about their legacies, like to leave their imprints on the future through their foreign policy doctrines.

The Monroe doctrine defined the Western hemisphere as America's backyard. The Truman doctrine of containment gave sufficient cover to the United States "to intervene during a period of general peace in the affairs of peoples outside North and South America." George W. Bush will be known in history for his so-called "war on terror" doctrine.

In a speech to an audience of military personnel aboard the amphibious assault ship Albion,

on January 12, Mr. Blair, who has lately become concerned about his place in history, outlined his foreign policy doctrine, whose main features are essentially the same as those of the Bush Doctrine.

The Blair Doctrine advocates British military interventions beyond Britain's borders in far-away countries, even though those countries do not pose any immediate threat to British territory.

Mr. Blair said: "Our armed forces will be deployed in the lands of other nations far from home, with no