

Power and water crisis

A concrete, time-bound plan of action is necessary

A severe power and water crisis has kept the country in a vicious grip. Where power is the issue, we have of late noted certain measures the authorities have taken toward redressing the situation. But such measures have been fragmentary rather than holistic and comprehensive. Shopping malls close down at 7 pm, staggered holidays have been introduced in certain industrial zones and, overall, steps have been taken toward ensuring load management. Unfortunately, with the growing incidents of electricity going off all over the urban and rural areas, often more than once in the course of a day as well as night, these steps have failed to have the desired positive impact. Of course, many of the problems in the power sector are those that the caretaker administration has inherited. That, however, is little consolation for citizens, who only know how grievously they have been suffering.

There are the many attendant problems that come with the instances of frequent power failure. The water shortage, though in a different category, nevertheless comes in here because an electricity failure makes it harder for WASA pumps to operate and for citizens to utilise their water pumps, motors, et al, to full capacity. Moreover, in a season when the young are taking part in examinations and in general trying to conduct their studies normally in the classroom, inadequate electricity surely augments the level of suffering. Nothing can be more disturbing than the sight of young boys and girls forced, in the persistent heat, into studying their textbooks in candlelight. And then there is the very vital matter of how much damage power failures or low voltage has been doing to such home appliances as PCs, television sets and refrigerators.

Of critical importance now is the matter of immediate relief. One might as well ask whether the authorities have exhausted all options about an improvement in the power supply at this point. Where the question is one of water, low supply in urban localities (with some areas receiving filthy, stinking water) has brought life to a miserable standstill. The bottomline should be clear. On such issues as power and water supply, a laid-back attitude on the part of the authorities will be regrettable. These are pressing public concerns regarding which concrete, time-bound plans for solutions are necessary. It is on the approach to these issues that the overall quality of governance depends. Let that quality be forthcoming, through a formulation of immediate, medium and long-term plans about tackling these issues. And let the general public be kept apprised of the moves.

Implementation of CHT accord

Land disputes remain the major stumbling block

THE caretaker government must be thanked for resuscitating the Advisory Council of the Ministry of the Chitttagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Affairs. One would recall that as per the relevant clause of the CHT Accord of Dec 2 1997, an advisory council was formed to assist the Ministry for CHT Affairs, which was formed also under the same provision of the accord, in its implementation. It is only the third time that the advisory council has met in the last ten years, twice before during the AL regime but never during the five years of the 4-party alliance rule.

It is indeed a sad commentary on the past governments' commitment to national issues. The short shrift given to the process of the accord implementation demonstrates the cynical approach to national problems. For sometime very little was done by the BNP government ostensibly because the accord was the product of the AL government. The accord is a commitment of the State and all governments are obligated to see it fulfilled.

We are happy to note that the advisory council has taken several decisions of which by far the most important is the reactivation of the Land Commission. It is a matter of regret that the Land Commission had remained largely inactive all the three years of its existence.

There are several issues that must to be addressed and resolved before the accord can be implemented in totality, and by far the most important of these is the disputes related to land between the indigenous people and the Bangla speaking settlers.

We are into the tenth year of the CHT Accord and we are still waiting for implementation of the vital and substantive provisions of the agreement. The CHT Accord is a good example of successfully tackling a long running insurgency problem through political accommodation, which has seen end of violence and hostility in the area. However, we should be aware that permanent peace cannot be achieved in the region without full implementation of the accord. The full potential of the CHT and the people can be realised only under conditions of durable peace.

Can we afford it?

The nation needs time to stand on its own feet. The backbone has been broken by natural and political calamities. Not for a single month has the nation seen real peace. How will it stand straight? It was being driven backward by the people called politicians. Let us utilize the opportunity to run the country forward, keeping the evil claws of politics, which has vitiated every aspect and side of the state. We should not be moved by their shrewd and motivated persuasion.

MASUM BILLAH

WE are talking about democracy and election. After casting his vote a citizen becomes absolutely powerless. We are going to spend a colossal amount of money for holding our national election.

As a humble citizen of this country I have few questions to all. Can we afford to spend so much money for holding elections, which never reflect original public representation? The representatives who don't think of the people, their welfare and the country are not real representatives.

We elected our representatives several times since we achieved independence, but no government could ensure uninterrupted electricity supply. No government actually thought of establishing power plants for keeping pace with the increasing amount of electricity

needed to feed the ever-growing industries, business establishments, and domestic demands.

Rural life goes without electricity. Getting several hours uninterrupted electricity in the areas under Rural Electrification Board is a rare happening. But every moment of life depends on electricity.

Our previous governments did not take any pragmatic steps to mitigate the sufferings of the citizens. The mosquito is another evil which no government tried to save the city from.

When the countrymen are undergoing shortage of electricity and suffering from mosquito bites, the nation is planning to spend millions of dollars for holding elections. Why? To elect some public representatives? Why ? So that they can pocket the nation's money and make their fortune utilizing and distributing the national wealth among the party supporters. The

Bangladesh at a crossroads



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

ADRIAN Leftwich (of the University of York) observes that Western governments and institutions do not appreciate that good governance and democracy are not mere components that can be inserted into a society like a socket or a valve, but depend basically on the character and capacity of the state to absorb the democratic conditions.

This leads to the debate of ranking of countries by institutions like Freedom House, Heritage Foundation, World Economic Forum, UN Human Development Index and Transparency International, as having full, partial or non-democratic governments.

Examples could be given of countries like Burma or Zambia where democratia, or power of the people, is either non-existent or has been trampled by "elected" dictators who give priority to demagoguery over development -- a reversal of the process of modernisation wherein the structural basis

of societies progressed from community in which natural will predominated to that of association in which rational will predominates.

The question that has remained unanswered is about the validity of the premise that materially poor societies are unable to create and sustain democracies. This is because in these societies the middle class, which plays a crucial role in sustaining the democratic way of life, is generally absent or numerically too small to a make significant contribution to transformation to a more distributive society, or to Joseph Stiglitz's "moral growth" that modern day ethical economists would endorse.

One of the reasons people prefer the democratic way of life is that the political leaders are expected to be accountable for their actions. But here again Professor Richard Sklar (of UCLA) points out that there are two principal forms of accountability that need to be distinguished between: accountability of the leaders to their followers, or democratic

accountability, as opposed to obligation of the office holders to be answerable to one another, which Professor Sklar would call "constitutional accountability."

Regardless of the polemical debate on the form of government that is demanded in the name of the "people," one may wish to put more emphasis on development -- a concept that embraces economic growth along with social development measured by a complex of indices.

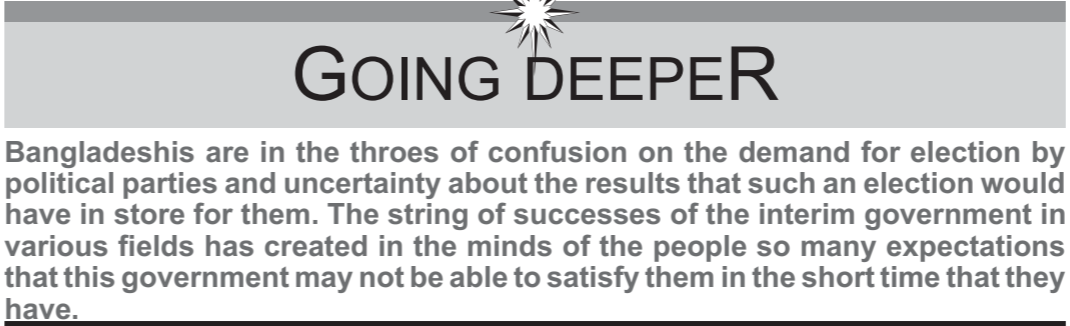
One may have a constitution without constitutionalism as alleged by an African political scientist who talks of "simultaneous existence of what appears to be a clear commitment by African political elite to the idea of the constitution, and an equal rejection of classical, or at any rate, liberal democratic notion of constitutionalism."

One may think that the people in developing countries have been given a choice between a mirage of Francis Fukuyama's "end point of mankind's ideological evolution

and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government," and a form of command economy in which coordination of economic activity takes place through administrative means, economic agents and, in particular, production organisations which operate primarily by virtue of state directives.

The success of command economies, that transformed Singapore from a Third World country into a First World country, and South Korea from a poverty stricken country to a member of the OECD, are being cited. But then debate has also taken place, particularly relating to South Korea, on whether command economy practiced in that country did not subvert the market mechanism, and whether a different approach could not have produced quicker and better results with a more egalitarian distribution of wealth.

A Western political scientist (C. B. Macpherson) has constructed a strong anti-liberal argument on democratic foundations. He con-



Making bureaucracy dynamic

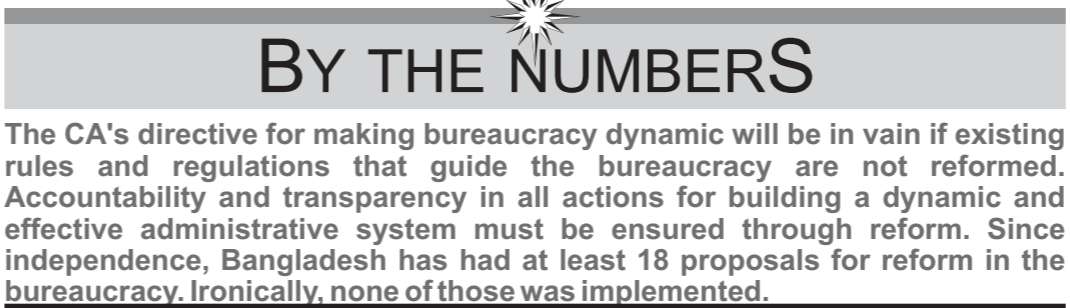


ANM NURUL HAQUE

THE chief adviser (CA) of the caretaker government (CTG), Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, has asked the top bureaucrats to fulfill their responsibilities to the people through ensuring prompt delivery of services. Placing the people at the centre of the administrative policy framework, he has also asked the civil servants to introduce an effective system so that people could easily complain against harassment by officials and employees of service providing organisations.

To make the apparently sluggish bureaucracy dynamic, the CA has stressed the need for scrapping the outmoded acts and rules and regulations of the ministries to simplify their modus operandi. He also asked for display of "client charter" in every government office to help the people get service promptly and without any harassment.

"Your attitude will have to be a positive and problem-solving one from the service-seeker's point of view. You will have to find out ways of resolving problems instead of creating obstacles and rising questions in providing services,"



he said in his second meeting with the secretaries of the different ministries on May 21.

The CA has spoken of the need to change the rules and regulations for infusing dynamism in the bureaucracy, and for bringing about the desired transformation to a pro-people administration. Quite pertinently, he has thrown a challenge to the civil servants to devise a "client charter" under which they are to be responsive to the needs of the taxpayers and the citizens of the country.

The bureaucracy is a body of professionals who are recruited and trained to serve the people from whom they also receive their impetus for creativity. As employees of the republic they are not expected to be loyal to the party in power, but are required to serve governments of different political ideologies without being partisan to any one of them.

Unfortunately, the bureaucracy in the country suffered much during the tenure of the BNP-led coalition government, due its naked politicisation of the administration.

The BNP-led coalition government, at the fag end of its tenure, gave mass promotions to civil servants entirely on political con-

siderations, apparently for getting them on its side during the election. According to a source in the Establishment Ministry, a total number of 2,380 officials were promoted during BNP's tenure, thus having a demoralising effect on all the tiers of bureaucracy. The bureaucracy came under keen public scrutiny due to such mass promotions.

The other dimension of such mass promotions was that a large number of officers having requisite qualification were deprived of promotion, which sparked agitation in the administration.

A large number of aspirants complained that an influential quarter handpicked the officers considering their loyalty to the BNP and its major coalition partner, Jamaat-e-Islam.

The CTG headed by Fakhruddin saw the disarray in our bureaucracy, and took the commendable step of promoting a good number of officers who were deprived of promotion on political consideration.

Political and dishonest recruitments have tainted the image of the bureaucracy as an institution. The speakers at a seminar organized by Social

Science Research Association in the city on May 30 opined that the image of the bureaucracy could be improved through bringing changes in the attitude of the bureaucrats, mainly through imparting proper training, as well as ensuring transparent recruitment.

The 27th BCS examination is a glaring example of the influence of the ruling political class in recruitment. The council of advisers of the CTG, in its meeting held on May 30, approved a proposal by PSC for cancelling the viva voce of the controversial 27th BCS examination after scrutinising the emerging irregularities.

The concept of bureaucracy, which means the rule of officialdom, came into being shortly before the French Revolution of 1789, and from there spread rapidly to other countries. Bangladesh inherited the bureaucratic system introduced by the British ruler.

The civil service in this sub-continent, under the British regime, was regulated as per the terms and conditions laid down in the India Act, 1935, which contained fair and beneficial provisions aiming to protect the interests of civil servants for performing their duties

tends that though citizens can have greater freedom in enjoying material benefits in capitalist societies they are compelled to transfer their natural powers to economic overlords, thus having a syndrome of "majority transfer of power to minority population" that ultimately goes against the interest of the general public.

Macpherson's contention strengthens Henry David Thoreau's reluctance to transfer all political power to the elected representatives, lest they behave in the way that we have witnessed in Bangladesh in the last five years.

Bangladeshis are in the throes of confusion on the demand for election by political parties and uncertainty about the results that such an election would have in store for them. The string of successes of the interim government in various fields has created in the minds of the people so many expectations that this government may not be able to satisfy them in the short time that they have.

One may try to understand the limitations of the interim government in the energy sector, which can have multiplier effects on water supply and the price spiral, even if external factors are left aside. It would, however, be a truism to state that high price is a function of the income of the people, so arguing that the prices of essentials have also gone up in neighbouring countries (where peoples' income has also increased) does not carry

neutrally.

The bureaucracy in Bangladesh, unlike in the neighbouring countries like India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, has failed to maintain political neutrality though it is reinforced by rules restricting political activities. Section 30 of the Government Servant's Conduct Rules of 1979 said, "No government servant shall bring, or attempt to bring political or other outside influence, directly or indirectly, to bear on the government or any government servant in support of any claim arising in connection with his employment." But this rule is honoured more in the breach than in observance.

Bangladesh does not have, as yet, any civil service act or any other law regulating the civil service. The Government Servant's Conduct Rules of 1979, the Government Servant's (Special Provisions) Ordinance 1979, the Government Servant's (Discipline and Appeal) Rules 1985, and the Public Servant's Dismissed on Conviction Ordinance 1985, contain the important rules regulating the civil service.

These rules and ordinances do not protect the civil servants from being repressed by the political party in power. This is also a reason for the bureaucrats becoming partisans.

The contribution of bureaucracy to good governance cannot be over-emphasised. Like in any democratic country, good governance in Bangladesh largely depends on the capacity of the civil servants to deliver service

much weight.

Perhaps the interim government may wish to adopt some of the measures recommended by the Center For Policy Dialogue (and published in the Daily Star), like governmental intention to maintain stability of prices of essential commodities; introduction of zero tariff for the essentials; introduction by NBR of specific flat rates per tonnage, replacing the existing tariff structure; increasing market agents at the import level to break the monopoly exercised by syndicates who have been fleecing the people of huge amounts by imposing prices that give them abnormal profits. As the CPD report is not yet a public document, one cannot but make only a preliminary observation of its recommendations and their rationale.

While the people should be aware that they are not deprived of "strategic coordination," i.e. a set of activities that people must engage in to win political power that authoritarian regimes end up doing by reaping the benefits of economic developments without giving the people political freedom. Bangladeshis should weigh the potential disadvantages of having an elected government without first building strong foundations of the institutions, and ensuring uninterrupted economic development that can support a sustainable democratic way of life.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

efficiently. How prompt and caring the civil servants are in solving the various problems that people face are the key factors for a pro-people administration.

To be frank and candid, politicisation of the administration sought not only to turn bureaucracy into a machine for serving coterie interests but also blemished its professional rectitude.

The CA's directive for making bureaucracy dynamic will be in vain if existing rules and regulations that guide the bureaucracy are not reformed. Accountability and transparency in all actions for building a dynamic and effective administrative system must be ensured through reform. Since independence, Bangladesh has had at least 18 proposals for reform in the bureaucracy. Ironically, none of those was implemented.

The UK government, from whom our bureaucracy is inherited, has gone for reforms and completely transformed its civil service, making it more accountable to ordinary citizens. Many other countries, including Australia and New Zealand, have undertaken administrative reforms. Bangladesh also badly needs to reform its rotten administrative system for making the bureaucracy dynamic, accountable and non-partisan.

ANM Nurul Haque is a columnist of The Daily Star.

comes to power, all the national thieves and plunderers will be in their positions again, at the cost of billions to the nation. So, why do we cry for this kind of democracy? I just cannot understand. Can we afford to nurture the national plunderers with the poor people's money?

As a common citizen of this country I feel forced to ventilate my feeling towards the present development and future of this country. We are the victims of circumstances. We no more want to see the most corrupt people run the country. We don't want to see people becoming hero from zero with the blessings of party men.

We don't want to see the most inefficient people at the helm of affairs by virtue of nepotism. We don't want to see the people who are supposed to be in jail run the state, and reign over our national assembly house.

Yes, the nation needs an election to learn whether people want a party government or a national consensus government. They don't want to surrender state power to a group of people who are inefficient, who didn't have any bright academic career, and who are not patriotic but corrupt. The nation has closely observed their contribution toward building the nation for long thirty-six years.

This land sees six months natural of calamities and six months of political calamities, when the whole country remains hostage to the will of our politicians who have shown quite no consideration for people's lives, security, and the greater interest of the nation. People have not forgotten those horrible days.

Our political gurus and masters are crying crocodile tears for democracy. What the nature of democracy is in our country, and in almost all the third world countries, is well known to us.

The nation needs time to stand on its own feet. The backbone has been broken by natural and political calamities. Not for a single month has the nation seen real peace. How will it stand straight? It was being driven backward by the people called politicians.

Let us utilize the opportunity to run the country forward, keeping the evil claws of politics, which has vitiated every aspect and side of the state. We should not be moved by their shrewd and motivated persuasion.

Mr. Masum Billah works for Post Primary Basic And Continuing Education (Pace) Program