

Reform imperative for political parties

ABMS ZAHUR

A government can never work well without efficient leadership. A bureaucracy can neither effectively discharge its duties nor can it provide quality plans or policies when lacking clear direction from leaders. During the last 15 years of democracy run by two lady leaders it has been proved beyond doubt that (i) without clear and neutral direction a government cannot reach its goals, (ii) catchy political slogans or sentimental statements are more useful for befooling the common people, and (iii) statecraft in any LDC with politically sensitive population is not only a serious matter it also needs high level skill. For effective implementation of ideas it is essential that the leader is popular. But this perhaps is not enough.

Both Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia were dragged into politics due to exigencies of the situation created by assassinations of Sheikh Mujib and Ziaur Rahman, respectively. Their only contribution appears to be saving their respective parties from

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disintegration. Normally, even a high calibre politician has to work hard to attain prominent position in the party. A party leader must understand clearly what is good for the party. If leaders are carried away by sycophancy no talent can save them from making blunders. These leaders have shown their serious weakness for sycophancy.

We do not say that nothing has been achieved during the last 15 years. Despite rampant corruption, nepotism, terrorism the rate of growth on average was better during the period as compared to Ershad regime (5.9% against 3.9%). There was also distinct improvement in the common man's participation in facing natural disaster. This was partic-

ularly seen during Bangladesh's longest flood in 1998. Furthermore, there has been a remarkable decrease in dropouts in primary schools. In the health sector the improvement was satisfactory. In fact performance in this sector is better than India. Even in sports, road communication or telecommunication clear improvement is evident. However, we find not enough evidence to exclusively congratulate these ladies for the said successes.

Notwithstanding appreciable cooperation of the people performance of these governments could not reach the desired level mainly due to poor leadership. Sheikh Hasina spent most of her time in recalling the glory of AL in the liberation movement, pointing misdeeds of razakars during war of independence and highlighting sacrifices of her family in attaining independence. She could hardly utilize her time for reforming her party through democratization. By ignoring the upcoming new generation of politicians her party was deprived of the necessity for dynamism, freshness and virility. Even the grassroots level leaders were not given adequate time. Frequent visits abroad to gather honours did not serve interest of the party. She never regretted for poor governance of AL in 1972-75, wrong decisions like introduction of presidential government, severe restriction on freedom of press and Baksal.

The main factors behind Khaleda's meteoric rise were: Zia's dedication and honesty; shabby handling of 1991 election by AL; leading role taken by her in mass uprising against dictator Ershad. Performance of BNP was somewhat satisfactory in 1991-96. This was possible due to her reliance and trust on more experienced, able and mature politicians, display of reasonable degree of tolerance, much less reliance on politicization, corruption and dictatorial behaviour. She exposed her weaknesses and incapability during her second term. The blunders include: partnership with fundamentalist parties; total lack of skill in handling alliance partners; inefficiency in choosing ministers/advisers;

insatiable thirst for power; under-estimation of opposition members, particularly AL; and allowing close incompetent and greedy relations to thrive (through various malpractices. Her latest decision to appoint her brother Sayeed Iskander vice president of BNP indicates a blind faith in dynastic rule).

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ABMS Zahur is a former joint secretary.



For a credible PSC and dynamic bureaucracy

SHEIKH HAFIZUR RAHMAN KARZON

THE council of advisers to the present caretaker government on May 30 requested the Public Service Commission to cancel the viva voce of the controversial 27th BCS examinations. They asked the Commission to complete all arrangements to reschedule the viva for all the successful candidates of the written examinations.

For last couple of months all the major national dailies published series of reports about the alleged corruption of the Chairman, members, and officials of the Public Service Commission. The newspaper reports unearthed how the questions of preliminary and written examinations were leaked, how candidates were asked irrelevant questions in the viva voce, and how marks were tampered.

We were taken aback when we discovered that there were syndicates in the Public Service Commission composing of members, officials and brokers who confirmed the selection of many candidates in lieu of money. This is sufficient to totter the edifice of civil bureaucracy in Bangladesh.

I humbly request the policy makers to ponder over two things. One, the teachers of the public universities are conducting the admission tests of the universities and the same teachers, when working in the PSC, are conducting the examinations of BCS. The fairness and credibility of public university admission tests are well-accepted, whereas procedural transparency, propriety, and public confidence of BCS examinations have dropped to the sediment. Second, a comparative study of the recruitment procedure of military officers and civil bureaucrats will

In a globalised world the civil bureaucracy has to execute the state policies, which include -- ensuring basic rights of citizens, reaching state facilities to the toiling masses, constructing infrastructure for agricultural and industrial development, keeping the country connected with the international community and even playing the regulatory role in communicating with the super highway of information and technology. Without an efficient and committed civil bureaucracy how Bangladesh can expect to cope with the current of 21st century?

reveal how the civil bureaucracy has been tainted at the very outset.

The Advisers of the caretaker government have considered the constitutional and administrative issues involved in the BCS examinations and humane aspects of the selected candidates. The grounds, put forward by the government side for cancelling the viva voce, were stated in a government handout. The handout said that "The meeting (of Advisers) took the decision after reviewing newspaper reports and various allegations about 27th BCS examination in order to restore confidence in public mind and establish transparency in the recruiting process for public jobs." (The Daily Star, May 30, 2007.)

The government decision has accepted the fact that there were gross irregularities in the BCS examination procedure, which has cast serious doubt in public mind about the individual credibility of the Chairman and members of the PSC and institutional sanctity of the Public Service Commission. If the government admitted irregularities which obliged them to restore confidence in public mind and establish transparency in the recruiting process, why did they cancel the 27th BCS examinations results partially? Is it judicious to redress any injustice in part? If the government would cancel the full

results of the 27th BCS examinations, would not it deter the future incumbents from committing this type of vices?

The government decision also contains a fallacy as it remains silent about the punishment of those who were responsible for the alleged irregularities. Civil society members several times have raised their voice to form the Supreme Judicial Council to inquire into the reported irregularities and corruption of the ex-chairman, members, and officials of the PSC and accordingly penalise them, if they are found guilty. The government admits the commission of irregularities and cancels the viva voce on that ground, but keeps the responsible persons beyond the ambit of justice. In no way this type of contradiction stands in tune with the crusade of the caretaker government against corruption.

I do not deny the fact that there are candidates who have been selected on merit and who do not have their age to attend another BCS examination. Their cases need to be considered discreetly.

The irregularities, anomalies, and sheer corruption in the BCS examinations procedure and recent government decision to cancel the viva voce have underlined the necessity to recast the

Public Service Commission. The appointment procedure of the Chairman and Members of the PSC, the way BCS examinations are conducted, the quota system, the eligibility and competence of the PSC officials must be brought within the ambit of scrutiny immediately. The members and officials, who were involved in the irregularities, if not replaced by neutral and competent persons, the coming viva-voce will be a mockery.

The editorial of the Daily Star on June 1, 2007 very correctly remarked that, "It is for the new Chairman now to set the right tenor at the PSC through the clearly hands-on leadership he has been demonstrating since taking charge. That obviously calls for the creation of a right, purposeful team which can take the organisation back to its moorings."

I want to draw, in the present context, the attention of the policy-makers, civil society members and commoners to consider the reconstruction of PSC as one of the most important agenda of the state. The civil bureaucracy constitutes the skeleton of a democratic state, spread over the whole country, from city to the remote villages.

The civil bureaucracy in Bangladesh is beset with many problems. The civil servants are not sufficiently sensitised and

committed to ensure the interest of the tax payers. But if we want to establish a pro-people civil bureaucracy, the first task of the caretaker government is to form a high-powered Commission consisting of Supreme-Court judges, academicians, bureaucrats, doctors and engineers to look into the constitutional, administrative, and procedural flaws of the PSC and civil bureaucracy in Bangladesh. It will submit extensive recommendations which will include, inter alia, the amendment of the Constitution and enactment of new laws to ensure recruitment of competent, committed and honest candidates in the service of the Republic and to make the civil bureaucracy very dynamic.

In a globalised world the civil bureaucracy has to execute the state policies, which include -- ensuring basic rights of citizens, reaching state facilities to the toiling masses, constructing infrastructure for agricultural and industrial development, keeping the country connected with the international community and even playing the regulatory role in communicating with the super highway of information and technology.

Without an efficient and committed civil bureaucracy how Bangladesh can expect to cope with the current of 21st century? Civil bureaucracy of many developed countries, like USA, UK, France, New Zealand, India, have undergone many reforms. Why should we lag behind?

Sheikh Hafizur Rahman Karzon is an Assistant Professor, Department of Law, University of Dhaka.

La Niña and Bangladesh floods

Right now, it looks like a weak La Niña is developing, which may cause a slight enhanced rainfall during the monsoon season. So, based on the maturity stage of this year's La Niña, the possibility to experience a normal (or slightly higher than normal) flood is high. But if the La Niña condition continues to gain strength then a different climate scenario may appear.

DR. MD RASHED CHOWDHURY

ACCORDING to the Climate Prediction Center (CPC), USA, a transition from ENSO-neutral to La Niña conditions is possible within the next 1-3 months.

La Niña refers to the appearance of colder-than-average sea surface temperatures (SSTs) in the central or eastern equatorial Pacific region (the opposite to conditions during El Niño) (Fig. 2). It is a cold event where the SSTs become anomalously colder compared to the long-term average, for the central and eastern equatorial Pacific.

La Niña episodes also feature large-scale changes in the atmospheric winds across the tropical Pacific, including increased easterly (east-to-west) winds across the eastern Pacific in the lower atmosphere, and increased westerly (west-to-east) winds over the eastern tropical Pacific in the upper atmosphere.

departures are negative in the Niño 1+2 (-1.9°C) and Niño 3 (-0.6 °C) regions, and remain near zero in the Niño 3.4 (0.0 °C) and Niño 4 (+0.4 °C) regions (Fig. 2).

Nearly all of the model forecasts predict below-average SSTs in the Niño 3.4 region (5°N-5°S, 120-170°W) during the remainder of the year. While most statistical models show ENSO-neutral conditions persisting through August 2007, most dynamical models indicate La Niña will develop within the next three months.

Over the past several months most of the statistical and coupled model forecasts have trended towards cooler conditions in the tropical Pacific through late-2006. The spread of the some of the statistical and coupled model forecasts (ENSO-neutral to weak La Niña) indicated some uncertainty in the outlooks. However, current conditions (stronger-than-average easterly winds over the central equatorial Pacific and recent cooling trends in observed oceanic conditions support weak La Niña conditions (may gain strength to become moderate) in the tropical Pacific during the next 3 months. Some forecast models continue to predict a rapid transition to La Niña by July 2007.

These conditions reflect an enhanced strength of the equatorial Walker circulation. When this Walker circulation is strong, the upper tropospheric winds in the Australasian region are easterly and consequently the tropical disturbances are transported westward into the Bay of Bengal. Therefore, rainfall activity becomes very active in the region of western Pacific.

As of June 8, based on the patterns of anomalous ocean temperatures (SSTs), atmospheric circulation and precipitation are consistent in indicating La Niña conditions in the tropical Pacific.

ENSO-neutral conditions continued in the tropical Pacific during May 2007, with average to below-average sea surface temperatures (SSTs) extending from the date line to the west coast of South America (Fig. 1). The latest weekly SST

lower than average atmospheric pressure prevails in the region from Australia to India when higher than average atmospheric pressure prevails in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean.

The scientific reason is that air flows from high-pressure regions to low-pressure ones. As a result, a huge volume of moisture propagates from the Pacific Ocean to Bangladesh and India; due to the prevailing low atmospheric pressure in this area at that time, the moisture-laden air rises, causing heavy rainfall in Bangladesh and India.

Several scientific researches have identified that during La Niña years (either strong or moderate strength) Bangladesh is often a victim of flooding (e.g., 1984, 1988, and 1998).

Right now, it looks like a weak La Niña is developing, which may cause a slight enhanced rainfall during the monsoon season. So, based on the maturity stage of this year's La Niña, the possibility to experience a normal (or slightly higher than normal) flood is high.

But if the La Niña condition continues to gain strength then a different climate scenario may appear for which we need to wait and monitor very closely the on-going La Niña event.

Finally, it is important to note that the seasonal forecast prepared here is probabilistic type, which is based on monitoring of the ocean and knowledge of how the atmosphere has responded in the past to similar SSTs (and La Niña) in Bangladesh, with a variety of lag times.

Dr. Md Rashed Chowdhury is Research Scientist of the Pacific ENSO Applications Centre (PEAC) and a Faculty of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Hawaii, USA.

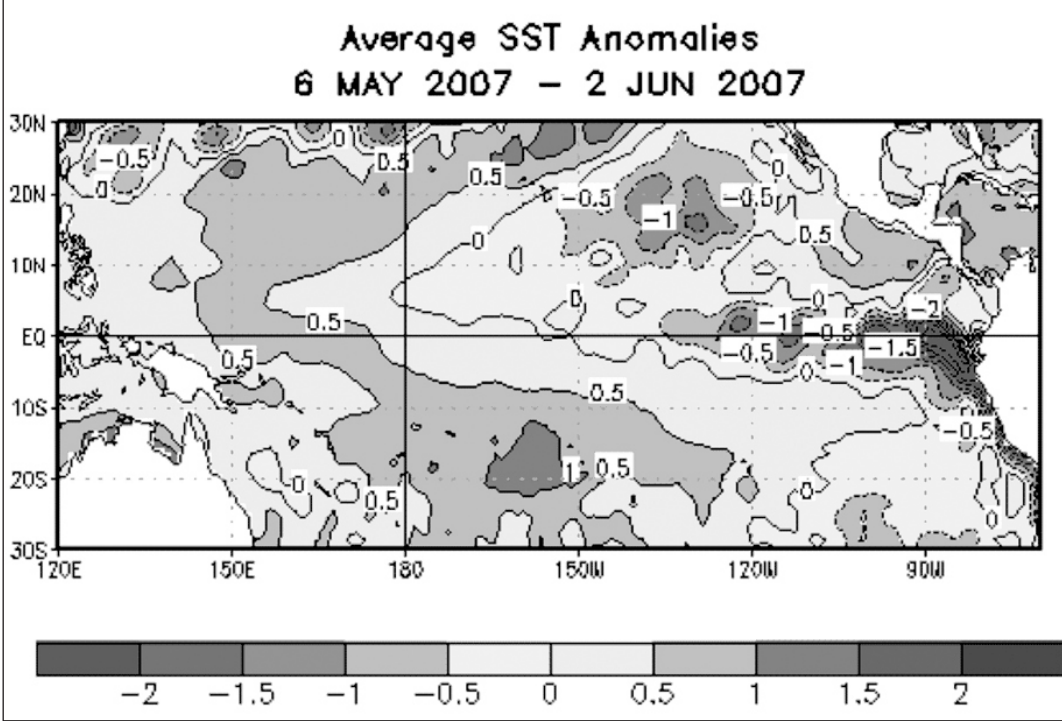


Figure 1. Sea surface temperature (SST) anomalies (°C) during the four-week period 6 May-2 June 2007 (Source: http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis_monitoring/ensو_advisory/index.shtml)

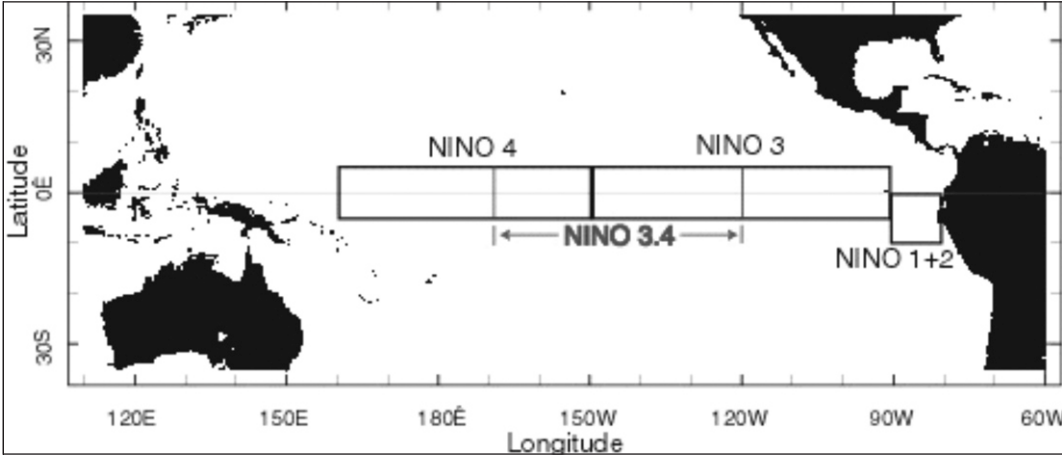


Figure 2: The Niño regions [Niño-1+2 (0°-10°S, 90°-80°W), Niño 3 (5°N-5°S, 150°W-90°W), Niño-3.4 (5°N-5°S, 170°W-120°W), Niño-4 (150°W-160°E and 5°N-5°S)].

Of Sino-US tensions

IMRAN KHALID

THERE has clearly been greater transparency on the part of the Chinese. I think that there are further opportunities for understanding better some of the strategic intentions of the Chinese," said US Defence Secretary Robert Gates on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue, the pre-eminent security conference in South-east Asia, at the beginning of this month. These words are fairly friendly when compared with the stance adopted by Donald Rumsfeld, who was habitually inclined to patronising a hard-line approach towards Beijing.

Apparently, in addition to having the personal soft touch of Robert Gates, these words are intended to muffle and pre-empt the expected Chinese reaction to the extremely pricking report by the Pentagon on

Beijing's defence plan. The US Defence Department report released on May 25, apart from discussing China's focus on the Taiwan Strait as a potential flashpoint, took serious note of China's alleged plans to expand and modernise its military capabilities.

The use of incisive language in the Pentagon's annual report to the US Congress on China is not a new thing, but the tone of this year's report is specifically vitriolic in its mention of China's intentions to enhance and build its military capabilities to tackle the crises and conflicts beyond the Taiwan Island.

"Analysis of China's military acquisitions and strategic thinking suggests that Beijing is also generating capabilities for other regional contingencies, such as conflict over resources or territory," the report asserted. Apparently, Washington is concerned over China's reported military build up, including deploy-

China's unbridled economic growth, coupled with a remarkable surge in its military capabilities, is increasingly enhancing its influence in the global power structure -- a factor that has started haunting the policy makers at the Pentagon to the extent of persistent phobia. The growing trade deficit versus China has further pushed the Americans to resort to some extreme steps.

ment of long-range ballistic missiles and development of sophisticated submarines, via a flagrant ballooning of its "non-transparent" defence budget.

In March, China announced that it would increase its defence spending by 17.8 percent to nearly \$45 billion in 2007. But the Pentagon report, citing US intelligence estimates, alleged that China's total defence budget could actually be between \$85 billion and \$125 billion.

As usual, the report alleged, "China's published defence budget does not include large categories of

expenditure, including expenses for strategic forces, foreign acquisitions, military-related research and development, and the paramilitary forces."

The report has further expressed serious concern over China's deployment of the DF-31 family of ballistic nuclear missiles with capability to hit the United States, as well as the development of a new JIN-class submarine equipped to carry a nuclear-powered ballistic missile with a wide-firing range potential of more than 8,000 kilometres.

The Pentagon has specifically

expressed bewilderment over the real intentions behind the fast-paced development of the JL-2 and JIN-class SSBNs submarines that have the ability to alter the nuclear balance in the Asia-Pacific region by enabling China to have more than nuclear deterrent.

The January test of an anti-satellite weapon by Beijing has already sent shock waves through the Pentagon, which is frantically trying to stop this programme in its nascent stage.

Obviously, China's expanding military capability is fast emerging as the key factor in determining the

military balance in East Asia, and it will have lasting ramifications far beyond the Asia-Pacific region. China-phobia is perhaps one of the most dominating factors that have occupied the policy-making machinery at the Pentagon for quite a long time.

China's unbridled economic growth, coupled with a remarkable surge in its military capabilities, is increasingly enhancing its influence in the global power structure -- a factor that has started haunting the policy makers at the Pentagon to the extent of persistent phobia.

The growing trade deficit versus China has further pushed the Americans to resort to some extreme steps. Reportedly, some US Congressmen have been planning to introduce legislation to penalise imports from China, to counter a currency which they believe is severely undervalued, by as much as up to 40 percent, to cause this trade imbalance in favour of China.

The Pentagon report has obviously attracted flak from Beijing. Its appearance, amid increasing prospects of anti-China legislation in the US Congress, has ostensibly heightened tensions in Sino-US relations, which are already marred by the mutual conflict of interests over the Middle East situation.

Against this backdrop, the soft words from Robert Gates appear to be a damage-limiting exercise. Contrary to his predecessor's hawk-

ish tendencies, Gates has been pursuing a relatively pragmatic approach towards global affairs.

Ever since he took charge of the Pentagon, he has been trying, though with little success, to influence President Bush to adopt more realistic and moderate line in the global arena -- particularly with respect to the Iraq operation.

He knows well that without China's support it will be very difficult for the Americans to ensure the much-needed stability in the Asia-Pacific region. Perhaps it is this compulsion that has been pushing him, in contrast with his hard-line peers in the Bush administration, to show restraint while broaching China. But the problem is that he is the only one in the current dispensation who propagates softness on China.

Dr. Imran Khalid is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.