

TIB report on NGOs

Good work must be supported by good management

THE study "Problems in good governance in the NGO sector: The way forward" published by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has caused quite a stir in various quarters, with a conspicuous knee-jerk reaction from the NGO sector itself. The study termed the NGOs a mid-level corrupt sector that lacked transparency and accountability having irregularities in their dealings. Among the more scathing accusations are: many of them bribe officials to get registered with the government; some exist only on paper; they are accountable to donors only and not to the beneficiaries; only a few NGOs receive 90 percent of the resources from donors and so on. The NGO leaders found those accusations leveled against the entire sector on the basis of the activities of only 20 organisations as "sweeping comments" and voiced their protest through Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh (ADAB) and Federation of NGOs (FNB).

It is possible that the TIB study would generate plenty of debate in the future with both sides coming up with arguments to prove their points. But we feel that all parties should keep in focus the indelible fact that a good number of NGOs have worked diligently throughout the decades to bring about significant changes in the socio-economic conditions in society. They have left their mark in creating mass awareness about the importance of primary education, girl child education, childhood disease control, primary disease control, sanitation, maternal and neonatal mortality, human trafficking, self-employment through vocational training and empowerment of women. We know that the model of non-formal education and oral rehydration therapy called ORS to save child mortality from diarrhoea have been taken up in many countries of the world. Today Bangladesh hosts the world's largest NGO, BRAC, which has a unique history of community mobilisation for social development beginning in an as yet Bangladesh. The impact of the good work of such NGOs, excepting that of some, have gone deep in the communities by now. Therefore, we believe there is no scope to denigrate or deny the relevance of the sector in Bangladesh. Dispassionate studies might show that the contribution of the sector weighs more than corruption and irregularities existing in some form.

To our understanding, the TIB study is an attempt at bringing forth the shortcomings in the state of management or governance of the NGOs and the loopholes that make some elements of corruption seep through. The number of NGOs has grown significantly and large amounts of funds have come into the country from the donors over the years but the aspect of good governance has not grown concomitantly in the sector barring a few exceptions. Therefore, there is an urgent need to improve the internal governance system of the NGOs, particularly in financial management. Quite often small NGOs lack capacity for strict financial discipline that lead to waste, mismanagement and corruption. NGOs must have stricter auditing and such audit reports should be made available to the public. We believe putting them on the website would be an idea worth looking into, as that would make the sector more transparent.

We have a hunch that the issue of corruption in the TIB study got blown out of proportion and the NGO leaders missed out on the recommendations given therein. At the same time we reiterate our conviction that many NGOs have done commendable work and nobody should use the TIB report to either undermine or control them. NGO leaders, on the other hand, must take the recommendations of the report seriously. Otherwise, a good opportunity will be missed to improve the work of NGOs.

A new, controversial term for Musharraf

It is clearly a hollow victory

PAKISTAN'S military ruler General Pervez Musharraf was on Saturday voted to yet another term of office with the opposition parties, which make up 30 percent of the electoral college, resigning or abstaining from participating in the elections. The elections witnessed violent anti-Musharraf protests at least in two of the country's major cities, Karachi and Peshawar, dashing Musharraf's hopes for a smooth and peaceful election. And now the military ruler also has to await a decision by the Supreme Court of the country on the results. Pending a decision on the appeals against the eligibility of the election, which may not be forthcoming before 17 October, Musharraf cannot be sure of his victory.

In such circumstances, the general, in order to give a semblance of legitimacy to his scheme of things went to the extent of granting amnesty to Benazir Bhutto, one of his key opponents, on graft charges that could also have the power for a power sharing deal with her. Pakistan is famously known for being in the grip of its military rulers for much of its existence since its coming into being 60 years ago. Although it has become a common phenomenon in many of the underdeveloped countries, the situation in Pakistan is of critical proportions with no visible signs of its return to proper democratic rule any time soon. Pakistan's legacy of military rule is also driven by both internal and external forces. Whatever the compulsive factors may or may not be, one thing for sure is that practices in statecraft and state management as they exist in Pakistan today do not augur well for the future of the country.

Democracy is just that, democracy. No country worth its name can claim to have done well for itself by opting for dictatorial rule. General Musharraf has certainly won a victory, but a hollow one that does the people of Pakistan little good. At another level, the activities of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto toward a power-sharing arrangement with Musharraf have done her little good and have actually thrown up an image of her as being guided by narrow, selfish political ambition. A beneficiary of these recent events may well be Nawaz Sharif, the former premier now in his second spate of forced exile in Saudi Arabia.

What awaits the AL



M. ABDUL HAFIZ

THE BNP the immediate past party in power, is already divided into rival groups for reasons convincingly advanced by a score of political analysts. This scribe also gave his considered views last week in this space. Since the Jatiya Party (JP) came about in the same way as the BNP (from the hands of another dictator) it is also inevitably in shreds for similar reasons.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), virtually being a breakaway faction of the BNP, has practically proved to be still-born. Some of the lesser political parties have risen to the surface like air-bubbles and already vanished -- disappearing almost unnoticed.

PERSPECTIVES

A complex dynamic of history unfolding or repeating itself is already at work. It will be both intensified and compounded when politics will be unleashed and fresh elements added to its discourse. We shall then see politics shaping itself in full focus. We may have to wait until then to know of the AL's fate and the power equation of the leaders within the party.

So far, only the Awami League (AL) remains in one piece, with its leaders, however, keeping their fingers crossed with regard to the party's fate. They, too, are jittery over what has happened to the country's body politic and have been severely jolted by the new political trends.

The AL is, however, a bit different in the material circumstances in which it emerged as the country's first constitutional opposition in 1949 in the face of stiff resistance from ruling Muslim League government which drove it from the pillar to the post. Right from its birth it had a roller coaster journey, garnering rich political experience along the way. It witnessed numerous ups and downs and intra-party conflicts and changes of guard before

it came of age. It is, therefore, far from easy for any quarter to break its unity which has been tested and survived many times in the past. As a result, the AL fraternity is once again obstinately holding together for survival.

In its long struggling history, the AL deftly underwent metamorphoses of much more momentous nature than what is demanded of it now under the rubric of reforms. If the reforms are calibrated changes aimed at bringing about qualitative edge, seldom has there been a political party that has undergone so much change like Awami League which at times voluntarily jettisoned the baggage in its possession. If required, it seems prepared to do it again.

The active AL leaders still at

large are painstakingly and with great care striking a delicate balance while their top leaders remain incarcerated. Among themselves, they seem to have buried the hatchet and ignored the canards and calumnies surrounding them. Notwithstanding these positive signs and careful avoidance of a confrontation with the authorities, it may indeed be difficult to effect a reconciliation between what is demanded of them by the authorities and what must be achieved by the AL to preserve its integrity and ideals. Much will depend on the scheme of things worked out by those who are empowered to give new shape to the country's future politics.

Then, there is the question of the cynics still lurking in the party



By all appearances, the AL's hour of trial is not yet over.

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Musharraf's deal with Bhutto: A case of political opportunism



HARUN UR RASHID

BOTTOM LINE

For many in Pakistan, Bhutto's compromise with President Musharraf is a frightening political development, and it means giving priority to personal interest over the country's interest. Honesty is a virtue in public life. What an impoverished Pakistan it would be if everyone sacrificed principles for personal interest like Ms. Bhutto, who professed democracy in the country.

his autobiography, *In the Line of Fire*, writes critically:

"Never in the history of Pakistan had we seen such a combination of the worst kind of government -- or, rather a nearly total lack of governance -- along with corruption and plundering of national wealth."

President Musharraf departed from his criticism of Bhutto and her government simply because he wanted to be re-elected as the president.

If he had to honour the principles of honesty, he would have not provided amnesty to Ms. Bhutto. Let Ms. Bhutto clear her name in the court.

Ms. Bhutto, on the other hand, always told her countrymen that Musharraf was a military dictator, and during his regime Islamic extremism has plagued Pakistan.

Bhutto has been calling for democracy in Pakistan from exile, where she has lived in style and splendour, whether in England or in UAE. Her personal "stinking" wealth is a sharp contrast to the conditions of the poor in Pakistan.

The new political situation has changed their tunes. Power is an addiction and a magnet, and hardly anybody sacrifices it or shares it. Greed and power replace principles of honesty and integrity. Both President Musharraf and Bhutto have shown that they are eager for

power.

President Musharraf, being unpopular with broad segments of Pakistani society, has been re-elected as president with the support of MPs of Bhutto's party.

Initially, the intention of her party MPs was to boycott the election by resigning from the parliament, like other opposition MPs did.

Ms. Bhutto initially opposed his re-election bid in the outgoing assemblies of which the President had won control in the last election, widely believed to be rigged. She dropped her demand because, to her, amnesty from corruption charges was most important so she could return to Pakistan. Is it not a reflection of her implied guilt of corruption?

Ms. Bhutto's prime interest is getting rid of corruption charges against her so that she can participate in election in January, and the deal does exactly that. That means her personal interest reigns supreme over national interest, many commentators have said.

Ms. Bhutto's deal with her political foe, dictator General Musharraf, is possibly one of the worst unprincipled political deals ever made by a politician in Pakistan. General Musharraf found Ms. Bhutto willing to retract her opposition in return for amnesty from corruption

charges. That was the bait for Bhutto, and she readily swallowed it.

The interesting fact is that the President granted amnesty to all politicians who were involved on charges of corruption from 1988 to 1999, except for former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, whom he ousted in the 1999 coup.

Musharraf positioned himself as a moderate-minded reformist and won admiration for economic growth by aligning his administration with the US on war on terrorism. The US pumped about \$10 billion dollars to his administration, that led obviously to economic growth.

Disillusionment set in later, as the president clung to two positions, president and army chief, although he had assured the Commonwealth Secretary General in 2004 that he would resign from the army post. That did not eventually occur in the interest of what he claimed as "national security." This implies that he cannot keep his word as the president of Pakistan.

In March, the military president demonstrated his dictatorial power by suspending the Chief Justice of Pakistan, which is contrary to the constitutional provisions. That was the last straw in stunting judicial independence. Eventually, he did not succeed. Because the chief justice was re-instated by his own peers in July. The president had to eat humble pie, and it was a severe blow to his standing and power.

There is an external factor behind the deal. Media reports indicate that the US and UK put pressure on the president to agree on a deal with pro-Western Bhutto so that Islamists could not get to power. They do not want the Islamists to have their hands on nuclear weapons.

Another question is: does it bring political stability in Pakistan?

Although the president has been re-elected, the result cannot be announced by the Election Commission until the decision on his eligibility to be a candidate for the presidency is decided by the Supreme Court. That means a Damocles' Sword is hanging over the president. If the Supreme Court decides against his eligibility, no one knows how the president will react.

Some observers say it is likely that, with the support of the armed forces, he may declare martial law and suspend the Constitution to avoid the ruling of the Supreme Court in the interest of "security" of the country. In the new scenario, he may not resign as army chief. The result is, back to square one.

As regards Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party, many within the party fear she has damaged her standing by dealing with unpopular military President Musharraf.

This is more so when another former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, did not compromise with General Musharraf, and within four hours of his return to Pakistan on September 10, he was exiled to Saudi Arabia, where he has reportedly been

put under house arrest.

In the eyes of many people in Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, politically, stands ten feet taller than Benazir Bhutto. At one stage, both Sharif and Bhutto had agreed to conduct a united campaign for restoring democracy in Pakistan. But when president Musharraf indicated a deal with Bhutto, she jumped at it.

Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto again have become political adversaries, and each has a disliking for the other. While Sharif comes of a rich mercantile family of the Punjab (where 60% of Pakistan's population live), Bhutto's family have been feudal landlords in Sindh. In the months ahead, political polarisation is inevitable in the country, and the divisions between Musharraf and his political foes are sharpening every day.

It is reported that Nawaz Sharif might arrive in Pakistan after Eid ul Fitr, once the president is re-elected. No one knows how the political situation will develop in the January election. Shafiq Mahmood, a former Pakistani Senator turned political analyst says: "All I see ahead is instability, difficulty and problems" in the country.

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Honesty is a virtue in public life. What an impoverished Pakistan it would be if everyone sacrificed principles for personal interest like Ms. Bhutto, who professed democracy in the country.

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Soft hands



M. J. AKBAR

BYLINE

The CPI(M) may be "small" vis-à-vis the country, but it is not merely big but dominant in Bengal. A Mulayam Singh Yadav, a Mayawati, a Chandrababu Naidu, a Naveen Patnaik may be dismissed as "small" in Delhi, but in their own playgrounds it is the Congress and the BJP who are small if not minuscule.

there has been an upsurge of a new mood: a desire to stick to a one-way street, to get away with what you can take.

Karnataka is a reflection of a larger phenomenon. The veteran of wife, H. D. Deve Gowda, has walked away from a commitment to hand over the chief ministership of the state to the BJP. Of course, he hopes to walk all the way to an electoral victory, but his crutch is a lame excuse. How far can a lame excuse take him? The BJP has hardly been lily-white, provoking its partner at every opportunity. But it stuck to the letter of the agreement.

The hard-liners in Tamil Nadu are, paradoxically, more fluid, but the alliance has gone askew

there as well thanks to a gratuitous provocation. Chief minister Karunanidhi might believe that he can get away with an insult to Lord Ram in his own state, but there has been serious collateral damage to his principal ally, the Congress, whose fortunes are determined outside Tamil Nadu. The controversy keeps rising a notch a week, when it could easily have been calmed down by a suitable phrase of regret. Even when a sort of apology was offered, it was hemmed in by less than apologetic nuances. Curiously, the Congress seems either unconcerned or completely unable to do anything about the spreading simmer. Karunanidhi has been around long enough to know that a boomerang has

struck the Congress even if it has possibly missed him. Does he? Not by the evidence.

Never were soft hands needed more urgently than to save the coalition at the top of the bunch, headed by Dr. Manmohan Singh. A prime minister who is in office thanks to support from the Left might have been expected to purchase velvet gloves for very soft hands in order to massage the plethora of thorns in the nuclear deal he has fashioned with his now good friend, George Bush.

Instead Dr. Singh, who had the reputation of being the gentlest of men, has been swinging out with a passion few expected. The worst of his anger has not been directed at the opposition, but at the Left. In a series of

comments he has literally dared the Left to do its worst, and now seems a little surprised when the Left has gone ahead and done its worst. A rigid certainty that he is right, and the only one who is right, does not help coalition sensitivities.

There are many senior voices in the Congress who believe (naturally, only privately) that Dr. Singh has hijacked the party with his inexplicable obstinacy. But any suggestion of even a mild compromise, like a little more time, provokes the muted threat from the prime minister that he will resign if talks with the IAEA and the Nuclear Suppliers Group do not proceed according to the calendar set by George Bush. If there are any medals for political fidelity, the Victoria Cross for heroism in the face of common sense should go to Dr. Manmohan Singh.

Is there a common strand in the sudden rise in the divorce rate in Indian politics? One explanation is obvious. The urge for power today has been replaced by the thirst for power tomorrow. The present coalition arrangements have clearly

passed their sell-by date. Everyone has moved into election mode. The controlling force of events is not what will keep an existing government in power, but what will -- hopefully, always only hopefully -- in a vibrant democracy such as ours -- bring a party back to power.

But why should the prospect of a general election encourage fragmentation? Surely political parties need all the allies they can manage to cobble together before they ask the voters to choose?

Not quite. We think of political parties as either "big" or "small." The "big" are the Big Two, Congress and the BJP, because they spread across about half the country. The "small" are the rest, the regional powers.

But this is not quite the way that the political players see themselves. Reverse the lens, and the second perspective might have more merit. The CPI(M) may be "small" vis-à-vis the country, but it is not merely big but dominant in Bengal. A Mulayam Singh Yadav, a Mayawati, a Chandrababu Naidu, a Naveen Patnaik may be dismissed as "small" in Delhi, but in their own playgrounds it is the Congress and the BJP who are small if not minuscule.

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In some states, the definitions are still in flux. That is why politics gets even more murky. The next election in Karnataka, for instance, will decide who is "big" and "small" between three claimants.

A progression process has now transformed into an elimination game in at least two states, Karnataka and Maharashtra. Maharashtra has two alliances, and four claimants. Intra-alliance tensions can become as volatile as inter-party antagonisms. The Shiv Sena and the BJP may have patched up for the moment, but their tensions will not disappear. The Congress and Sharad Pawar's NCP can barely maintain a civil attitude towards each other. Everyone knows that the next election might change a rectangular balance of power into a triangular one. In other states, new forces are shifting traditional vote blocs. The biggest player in the coming churning will be Mayawati, who will

foment a surprise or two in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra.

Partly as a consequence of competing ambitions, and partly because too many differences hinge on personality rather than ideology, there is recognition (albeit unmentioned) that the next coalition to rule India will be created after the results of the next general election are known, and will not emerge from a pre-election alliance.</p