

Admin officials' unexpected ire

But separation of judiciary must on Nov 1

WE express our utter shock at the way a section of the administrative officials ventilated their ire at the government on Sunday on the issue of separation of the judiciary from the executive. They put forward their demands in a seminar issuing threats to go for work abstention if those were not met by the government. It goes beyond our comprehension whether government officials while in service can question, reject or counter a government decision taken on the basis of a Supreme Court directive. What surprises us most is the fact that the issue in question has been under the spotlight for many years now and the relevant file has been circulating among the bureaucrats for equal number of years. Then why did not the officials raise the objections during this period that they are raising now?

Some of their demands may merit attention but such visible, defiant outburst coming from serving government officials is not only unprecedented but also unacceptable. The senior and responsible government officials have belittled their cause by taking a confrontational attitude and posture, and we believe it has violated the terms given in the service rules.

We understand that there is need for logistics and human resources to make the separation of judiciary meaningful. And the demand for bringing the judicial magistracy under the Supreme Court secretariat also deserves to be deliberated upon. But at the same time we find that the options put forward by the government for the administrative cadre clearly indicate that there was no reason for them to feel redundant. We suggest to the administration cadre members that whatever reservation they still have about the issue, they should put forward through proper channels and request the government for reconsideration. Let us make it amply clear to them that separation of the judiciary is the demand of the moment and it will be done, regardless of who opposes. The transition period will be of tremendous significance. All steps must be taken to ensure that dispensation of justice is not hampered in any way.

We once again reiterate that whatever substance was there in the demands it got lost in the manner in which these were raised on Sunday. We know that any new step forward may have some initial problems, and we are ready to face them. Since the issue is of utmost national interest it should not be stalled for any reason whatsoever. The nation looks forward to the implementation of the decision on November 1 and not a day later.

No quick fix solution to terrorism

South Asia must awaken to this reality

MILITARY operation in countering terrorism, particularly if ethnic discord happens to be the root cause of the conflict, can hardly lead to a durable solution. Some perhaps are led by the mistaken belief that the military might provide a quick fix solution to this problem.

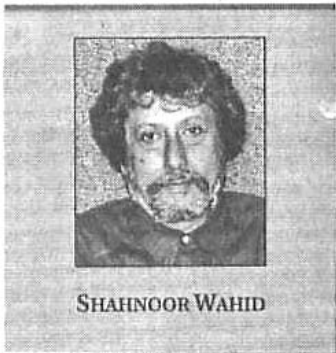
While that happened to be the considered opinion at the three-day international seminar on countering terrorism held at the Sri Lankan capital recently that related primarily to the Sri Lankan situation, the observation applies to all countries, in particular the South Asian countries, all of which are having to contend with the scourge of terrorism of various shades and in various intensity.

Certainly, force is not the answer to what is primarily and essentially a political problem, although one could not be blamed for thinking that force was the be all and end all of all our efforts in countering terrorism, given the way the current global terrorism is being confronted by the Americans.

While the situation in Sri Lanka had gone beyond being only an issue of terrorism, and its military operations were aimed at providing the political space, what should not be overlooked is that military victory tends to be transient if that is not followed up with moves to address the bone of contention, in other words tackling the root causes of the problem. And this message, that came out unequivocally and unambiguously, must not be lost on the countries of South Asia. Terrorism is merely a symptom of a greater malaise, and if focused exclusively upon will lead us astray in our fight against terror. The military can only employ a holding action, to prevent the situation degrading further and create conditions that will compel parties to the negotiating table.

Bangladesh can rightfully take pride in having resolved its longstanding ethnic conflict but there still are forces that remain convinced that violence is the only path towards fulfilling political goals. While elimination of this scourge may not be possible entirely it can be largely contained if we address the motivations that drive these groups to act in the way they do. What was prescribed for Sri Lanka was based on acknowledgement of certain realities. We all must be fully conscious of those.

Why not clone honest politicians?



SHAHNOOR WAHID

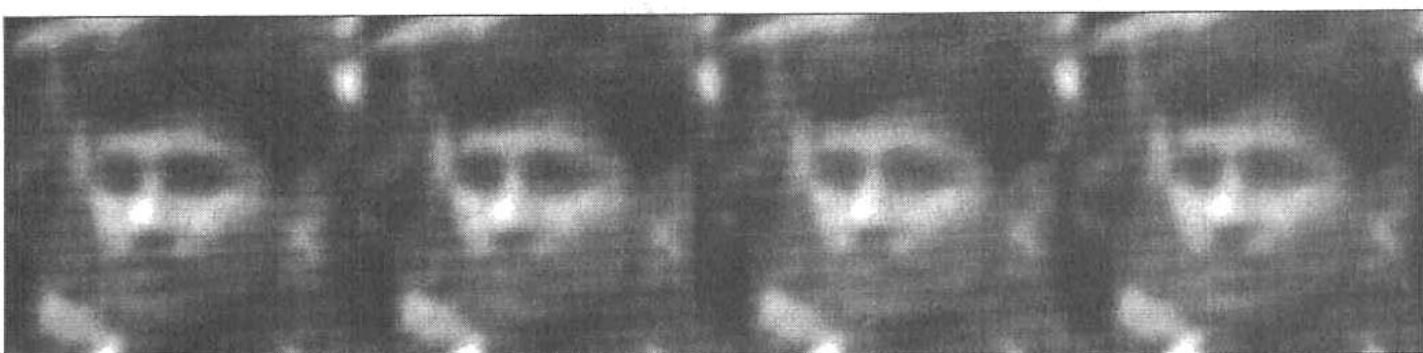
THE country is faced with an insurmountable crisis. It all started after our political seashore had been devastated by a small tsunami. Now, there is a short supply of honest and credible politicians in the country and, as a result, politics is in the doldrums.

With the general election approaching fast the country's major political parties have to showcase 300 credible candidates for the 300 seats in parliament, but in the changed circumstances they have only about two or three in their bags. The rest are either in jail or bhagawat in some distant lands.

All the parties are now on the lookout for anyone whose features give the slightest impression of having some honest dispositions and ethical endowments. Political leaders are allegedly going through the CVs of such people in their constituencies and in the jails (where they

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

If the cloning fever catches on then our economy will also get the desired boost, and we shall be able to reach all the desired digits on the development graph. Since we have abandoned the jute industry, and since our garment industry is faced with various overseas tricks, we should innovate and go for setting up laboratories for doing the cloning. Think of it brother politicians. But you shall have to take caution not to clone by mistake those who remain sleepy all the time or play taped speeches of others at public meetings or threaten to produce trump card every now and then.



had sent them in the past for being honest and not joining their party).

Because of such desperate scouting, we have heard that honest people now fear to go out and expose themselves to the political leaders.

So, dear readers, it has come to this. Now honest people in Bangladesh feel threatened once again for a reversed reason. It is not safe to be honest in this

country!

As we said before, the number of good, honest politicians is dwindling in the country, hence we have a suggestion to make that might help circumvent the problem. Let the political parties clone the honest, upright, courageous and most importantly knowledgeable politicians. Why not? This is a technology-driven world, and we are cloning seeds, lambs, fish, horses and many

other organisms so that we can have as many of them as we want.

By cloning the honest politicians we shall ensure credible candidates in the election, people will love to go and vote for them, and we shall fill the 300 seats in parliament and form the next government.

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able to reach all the desired digits on the development graph. Since we have abandoned the jute industry, and since our garment industry is faced with various overseas tricks, we should innovate and go for setting up laboratories for doing the cloning.

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produce trump card every now and then.

Frankly speaking, if you look around you will find the political sector filled with unworthy people, who cannot even speak and argue with conviction or great bursts of brilliance.

The pity is, we are stuck with them, as we have very little option. Unless political parties find candidates acceptable to the

people, we shall be forced to see Looting Part Two.

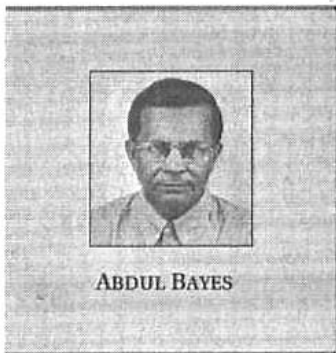
But there is the other side of the story; the brighter side if we may say so. There is no reason to believe that our society has totally run dry of honest candidates of good character, dignity and strong personality, who can lead from the front. We do come across such personalities in our daily interactions in life. They make us look at them twice, with veneration and awe at times, by the amazing works they do for the common people. Then why don't they come forward to join politics?

They must come forward like the missionaries to bring light to the dark forest. They must come so that the corrupt and the mean can go. They will rally round themselves more good people, and restructure politics in this country. They will do the necessary reforms because the reform process cannot be undertaken by the thieves who have been in the looting process.

Let such people be encouraged by everyone of us in our constituencies. The literate, honest section of the people must not leave politics in the dirty hands of the professional politicians any more. The corrupt must perish for good.

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Brainstorming basics from Beijing



ABDUL BAYES

BEIJING, the capital of China, had been growing briskly over the years as far as conferences are concerned. The reasons are not far to seek. The most populous country of the world is growing economically at an enviable rate, and its pace of poverty reduction is worth the wonder and eminence.

But the previous conferences apparently would pale before the last one held on October 17-19. It is likely to be so for two reasons. First, the theme of the conference: "Taking action for the world's poor and hungry." A galaxy of experts, researchers, activists and policy makers from all over the world were drawn in a brainstorming exercise of identifying the causes of, and initiating the cures for removing, poverty and hunger.

Second, the conference covered almost all aspects of poverty and hunger that economists, politicians and sociologists could possibly make a list of. In a lighter vein, I can say that it was a "pin to

BENEATH THE SURFACE

There is no disagreement in the fact that what is needed is inclusive growth with emphasis on rural growth. Agriculture and rural development holds the key to actions. Access to assets, infrastructure and markets are required, and public policies should be tuned to that direction. Also, governments have to strengthen social protection. Increasing investment in education and health, particularly for women and children, has to be on the top of agenda relating to alleviation of poverty and hunger.

plane" discussion on poverty related paradigms. The "mind boggling mega-meeting," if I am allowed to call it that, was organised by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development (LGOPAD), China.

For most of what I shall present below in this column today, I shall heavily draw upon the concluding remarks made by Joachim von Braun -- the Director General of the IFPRI and a world famous economist well-known for his researches on sustainable poverty reduction in developing countries.

Poverty is pervasive

Looking at figures, one could conclude that poverty continues to be pervasive all over the world. Globally, about 1 billion people are "absolute" poor, living on less than a dollar a day. This is just the tip of the poverty-iceberg; about 162 million people groan well under that mark of 1 dollar/day;

about 800 million are hungry, lacking sufficient access to food to lead healthy, productive lives. Far more people suffer from vitamin and mineral deficiencies.

Although the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) -- to halve the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day by 2015 -- maybe met at global level, in some regions it will not. Thus, one should be cautious in deriving consolation from the outcome as the aggregate poverty reduction picture might conceal the regional clouds. However, even if poverty falls by the expected level, 700 million will still remain extremely poor in 2015 and beyond, and 600 million will have to go to bed every night without food.

Concepts and concerns

Successful actions need theory and development of concepts, and a rich discussion on that score followed in the brainstorming sessions in Beijing. Growth per se is no panacea; rather, growth plus should be the pre-

scription. There are good inequalities (e.g. incentives to innovations) and bad inequalities (e.g. conspicuous consumption), and a clear bifurcation is called for.

Again, there is a "poverty trap" where poverty itself could be the cause of inequality, as opposed to the prevailing wisdom that says that inequality leads to poverty. Achieving MDG is a function of economic growth, change of income distribution, targeting policies and coverage, appropriate program design etc. The drivers of inequality are credit constraints, exclusion, risks, uncertainties and lack of incentive issues in public transfers.

Pockets of poverty

The largest segment of the world's poorest lives in sub-Saharan Africa, faced with continuous conflicts, and hence, tends to suffer stagnation. The message is that political instability or crisis cripples the poor the most. The twin problems of predominantly rural poor and growing

number of urban poor also drew the attention of the speakers.

Interestingly, beneath the surface, the minorities (e.g. ethnic groups, women, disabled, children) are the majority amongst the poorest, and this largest group benefited the least from growth and development. Also in evidence are substantial movements in and out of poverty.

Risky roads

The roads towards attaining the MDG are risky too. Occasional crises cripple the poor most. Food prices and resource scarcity, macro-economic imbalances, climate change and environmental sustainability stand to thwart attempts to eradicate poverty and hunger. Those who crossed the poverty line suddenly fall below to join the army of the poor. Thus, various types of poverty reduction strategies need to be undertaken. The short, medium and long-run policies should be clearly spelled out.

Key actions

There is no disagreement in the fact that what is needed is inclusive growth with emphasis on rural growth. Agriculture and rural development holds the key to actions. Access to assets, infrastructure and markets are required, and public policies should be tuned to that direction. Also, governments have to strengthen social protection.

Increasing investment in education and health, particularly for

women and children, has to be on the top of agenda relating to alleviation of poverty and hunger. Ecologically backward areas should be provided with research and technology. Increasing crop productivity, and provision for environmental services should be ensured.

The Chinese "soup"

It appears that the selection of the venue for holding such a conference was right. If the level and the pace of poverty reduction could be ranked, China would definitely stand at the top of Chinese record on that score is simply outstanding: from 33 percent a few decades back, poverty level stands at 10 percent now!

The most important lessons on the basics of alleviation of poverty that China gives us is its adoption of policies and programs on the basis of experimentation and pilot tracking: if you succeed in pilot projects, scale up, otherwise abandon them. Foreign aid and grants are essential, but must suit the country's own conditions.

Without agricultural and rural development, poverty reduction will be a futile exercise. People must be empowered in the formulation and implementation of developmental projects. Socialist or market economy of Chinese variety is the soup that other countries could sip for their survival.

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In search of common sense

The Tällberg Forum 2008 will pursue new systems for sustainable and secure development upon which humanity ought to agree. The Tällberg Foundation will organize a series of workshops in seven national capitals in cooperation with diverse partners. The full potential of the Internet will be explored for debate, with a goal that the process will develop global public opinion that does not stem from individual political, national or economic interests.

BO EKMAN

THE process of globalisation has transpired for ages, but during the past century its development grew exponentially, paced by population explosion, technological revolution and economic hyper-growth. However, as people, economies, societies, cultures, production systems are increasingly more intertwined, we find ourselves without effective political mechanisms to create solutions for the whole.

While the new problems do not recognise any national boundaries, every nation has sovereign power over its own territory and to pursue its own interests.

The Tällberg Foundation thus proposes a project to put forward new frameworks for international negotiations, new constructs for agreements and, consequentially, new or changed institutions for global governance.

The initial objective is to develop recommendations for the long-term viability of humanity's relationship with nature. We will use well-tested planning methods used by the most successful companies to develop strategies and structures for global operations: advanced planning in their long-term development; experiments and prototypes; research and product development combined with risk analyses.

Such planning is missing in the international systems of negotiations that should guarantee welfare and security for all. Responses today emerge based upon the capriciousness of spontaneous crises that erupt from changes in the balance of power. This is not a well-reasoned approach.

Environmental and climate issues are themselves, by definition, systems problems. No one nation can solve the climate problem; no one nation controls the

solution to "its" water problem.

Unfortunately, the world now relies on a system that thrives on economic growth. To question the idea of growth is a modern taboo. That growth should have limits is not in our time a politically or economically acceptable perspective, but environmental crises and climate change would say otherwise. Current trends of growth destabilise our future.

The political rhetoric of the day is that continued high global economic growth is compatible with avoiding the effects of climate change. This has not been proved. Our lack of knowledge is our greatest risk.

All serious research demonstrates that our one planet does not suffice to meet the growth ambitions of everyone in the current technological infrastructure.

No one technology, no one policy, no one set of values or single nation, can restore or guarantee

the future of the environment, security and livelihoods for all the people of the Earth. China cannot do it, nor can the US or the EU.

Perhaps least likely to do it is the United Nations. The American invasion of Iraq clearly demonstrated that the institution does not have the authority to limit a super-power's ambition to maximise its own interests.

But all parties must be part of the process toward political agreement that can lead the way toward development that is truly sustainable. The new reality born of globalisation is "the territory of the whole." It is a commons. Yet today we lack political debate about how to organize our global society.

Instead, distrust among nations and groupings of nations has grown steadily for many years within multilateral organisations, particularly the UN and WTO -- with conflicts between poor and rich nations, between the North and South, East and West, between various religions, ethnic and cultural spheres.

There is also a sense of mistrust and resignation in the international system over the ever-increasing gap between expressed promises, agreements in force and results delivered. A plethora of examples can be found among

environmental issues. Despite more than 500 international treaties now in force, it is a scientifically established fact that the sustainability of Earth's ecosystems continues to be undermined.

The combination of economic growth and globalisation has engendered an intensification and exploitation of natural resources unparalleled in history. The technological infrastructure -- primarily energy production -- is not compatible with the growth that 6.6 billion people see as their vision of the future.

The problem is that too many in too short a time strive after too high a material standard of living relative to the planet's capacity for delivery. We are caught between our own material ambitions and the Earth's supportive capacity. That is our dilemma.

Within 30 years the world's population will grow to 9 billion. This population will place the ecosystem under an enormous stress.

Economic growth and thus the accompanying exploitation of natural resources must not take place under any circumstance at unacceptable levels. "Business as usual" is, with today's knowledge, not an alternative. We must discover new formulas for politics,

economy and business models: "Business as Sustainable."

Today's private and public insurance systems are designed to accommodate the risk landscapes of the past century, not those of the future.

Water is but one example of a resource with alarming imbalances throughout the world. In north-western Europe, parts of North America and South America, water is plentiful. However, in large areas of Africa, the Middle East, Pakistan, India, China and western and southwestern US, water is approaching critical levels.

The shortages are greatest in the most densely populated areas. Today, 1.2 billion people do not have access to safe freshwater, and 15 percent of Earth's rivers do not reach the sea. In areas of China, the situation is acute. Groundwater levels are sinking in many regions of the world. Global warming will hasten this process as will changes in rainfall patterns.

Of all the water on Earth barely 2.5 percent is freshwater, and of this amount less than 1 percent is directly accessible to humans and animals in lakes, rivers, reservoirs and aquifers. It is not altogether unlikely that we will be forced to exploit Greenland, for example, to meet the growing human need for

freshwater.

The struggle for natural resources will harden geopolitical tensions, with resulting military conflicts and terror. The conflicts will appear first over access to freshwater in the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

In our time there are no longer new worlds to which millions could once emigrate. In the worst case, a drawn-out fight for survival awaits us, as the international systems of economy, finances and logistics erode.

Efforts are underway to develop new forums to manage globally shared issues, including the G8 summits, the European Union and the African Union, the Asean grouping, along with many international agreements and conventions.

The global problem areas include climate and ecosystem effectiveness, energy provision, poverty eradication and equity, economic growth and technological development, and security.

Management of immense global-systems issues is too often fragmented, handled from the perspective of solitary nations' relative economic and military strength. In this age of globalization, the world needs new principles and models to meet the fast-

growing mutual dependencies.

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The full potential of the Internet will be explored for debate, with a goal that the process will develop global public opinion that does not stem from individual political, national or economic interests.

The project will be a "test track" for new prototypes that will manage the problems that yesterday's models no longer can manage.

One Swedish tradition might serve as a model: Allemansrätten literally means "Everyone's right" or "Common right." Not a law, it is a centuries-old principled practice protected by the Swedish Constitution: Everyone shall have the right of access to nature. You may go anywhere as long as you heed the common sense of freedom and responsibility concisely expressed in the phrase, "Do not disturb, do not destroy."

Bo Ekman is chairman of Tällberg Advisors and founder and chairman of the Tällberg Foundation.

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