

## Blueprint for democracy

**Democracy has to be established at every level. It is not possible to discuss and solve all problems in a national assembly or parliament. Some of them must be dealt with at local level. This is what we call "local government." Besides, the essence of democracy cannot be practised by those who do not follow democratic principles within their own parties.**

**FAZLUR R. CHOWDHURY**

**T**HE success of democracy depends on various factors. Education is perhaps number one on the list. Then comes human rights. This would include freedom of expression, right to information, tolerance for each other's philosophies, and rule of law. All these factors have to come together to bring success to democracy.

Having an elected parliament and a cabinet does not mean democracy. Democracy has to be established at every level. It is not possible to discuss and solve all problems in a national assembly or parliament. Some of them must be dealt with at local level. This is what we call "local government." Besides, the essence of democracy cannot be practised by those who do not follow democratic principles within their own parties.

The civil service is not the government. In a democratic society, the government is elected by the people (government of the people, by the people, for the people), and the civil

service provides support and assistance to the government in the implementation of policies.

The civil servants at local levels must provide service to local governments in the same way that the Bangladesh Secretariat at Dhaka provides the support service to the national government. In this article we shall discuss two issues -- democracy within political parties and democracy at local government level.

The events of 1/11 have taught us a lot. We do not want to go back there. God has given us an opportunity and we must make best use of it. We must achieve fundamental changes and put democracy on track so that it does not get derailed again.

First, let us talk about reform in political parties. We do not want political parties to be headed by hereditary leaders. Let not political parties be used as family property.

We should soon have an ordinance, perhaps under the title "Democratic Reform Ordinance" or "Electoral Reform Ordinance," specifying

the requirements for registration of political parties with the Election Commission.

The ordinance must also outline the principles on which political parties should be based. In other words, the parties must base their own constitutions on democratic principles.

The parties must be identified on a national basis and not as regional parties, and must be secular in nature. They must have provisions in their constitution that they shall not maintain or support student wings, and shall never instigate violence for achieving political objectives.

The parties must remain committed to resolving all matters through democratic means. Finally, they must also spell out as to who can or cannot contest an election. Any criminal record should automatically disqualify a person, and the person must also meet some minimum criteria in respect of age, education, etc.

The first stage of dialogue between the political parties, the



**We want to be heard!**

government and the Election Commission should take place immediately to decide on a framework for such an ordinance. This must be completed by the end of March 2008. The ordinance should then be promulgated by April 2008.

The political parties that intend to participate in the forthcoming election must complete their constitu-

tions by June 2008. They should then have their own elections in accordance with their constitutions by August 2008. The registration of the political parties with the Election Commission (after notifying the Commission of their constitutions and elections) and allocation of their election symbols should be completed by September 2008.

There will be enough time for political campaign for more than two months. The election should be held by the second week of December 2008. The president should invite the leader of the winning party to form a government by the third week of December 2008 and call the parliament into session at the same time. The parliament should consider

turning the provisions of the ordinance into law. The parliament should then look into all discriminatory provisions in the constitution and try for their removal. There must not be any quota system. The constitution must provide equality and justice for all.

Now let us focus on local governments. There could be several tiers of local government. We should give priority to local government at Zilla and Upazilla level. The local governments shall have control and jurisdiction over all matters (especially development activities) within their own jurisdictions.

However, the District Council will work within the policy and framework outlined by the national government, and, similarly, the Upazilla Parishad will work within the scope of policy decided by the District Council. In other words, the local government will not take any decision contrary to the policy of the higher body.

In a way, local government will ensure more effective implementation of national policies. The elected persons will play their roles within the jurisdictions they are elected for.

All civil servants stationed in Zillas and Upazillas shall also be answerable to local governments, apart from the administrative control of their respective ministries. The deputy commissioner should be redesignated as district co-ordinator.

He is not the "zilla proshashak," because nobody has elected him. He will be the senior-most civil servant within the district, co-ordinating all activities with the central government as well as the District Council.

In the similar manner, all civil servants at Upazilla level must also be answerable to the Upazilla Parishad, apart from their respective departments or ministries. The UNO (Upazilla Nirbahi Officer) should be the senior-most civil servant at Upazilla level, co-ordinating all activities with other civil servants as well as the Upazilla Parishad.

Thank God, the judiciary is already separated. The Anti-Corruption Commission should also continue to act independently. The country also needs a commission for human rights, equality, and justice. The next thing we require is a law providing right of information, with certain exceptions as provided for in the UK law.

In a very brief paper, I have tried to give some sense of direction as to how we should move forward as a civilised democratic society. The nation-wide dialogue with all concerned must start now to decide on the finer points, especially the final wording of the all-important ordinance.

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## An urgent call for the CTG

**The CTG must act now. To start with, it can lift the barrier on entry into the ministries as deputy secretaries by lifting the 75% quota reserved for members belonging to the administration cadres. This is one of the major bottlenecks in getting the services of the "brighter" officers working in other cadres.**

**SYED MUSHEEQUR RAHMAN**

**T**HE caretaker government (CTG) of Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed completed one year in office on January 11 this year. The CTG took charge with lots of promises, which kept on fading as the days passed by. Unfortunately, within this short time, the people are getting somewhat disenchanted, at least as far as their economic well-being is concerned.

Although the initiative taken by this CTG in reforming key institutions like the Election Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission and Public Service Commission, and in the separation of the judiciary from the executive, is laudable, the frustration in the general public could not be removed as the government has apparently failed in materialising its overall economic agenda.

We can certainly admit that all these reform measures would have been impossible under a

"democratic environment," but we are yet to see any vigorous attempt to bring back the lost confidence of the business community.

The prime reason for our frustration could be that the fruits of the reforms made so far will not be visible unless they take firm root deep down, coupled with a change in the mindset of the people responsible for their execution.

If we closely scrutinise the actions of this CTG from the beginning, we will see that they could not produce the desired output largely due to the people responsible for implementing them. There was no dearth of good intentions, yet we witnessed the price of rice reaching an all-time high.

And this is where I would like to draw the attention of this government. It's common knowledge that no matter how bright our ideas are they are of no use unless professionals effectively implement them.

The latest example is the poor ADP implementation! These policy issues are generally dealt with by the ministries, which are manned by civil servants who are mainly from the administration cadre. We have been witnessing that members of this particular cadre overwhelmingly influence the government's decisions, be it a political government or an interim government like this CTG.

The latest demonstration of this service, while effecting the separation of judiciary, has cleared the public mind on their roles during the past several years in complying with this constitutional obligation.

The key and specialised ministries and divisions like finance, commerce, industries, communications, energy, ICT, and many commercial entities like banks, aviation etc. are headed by the members of this service, mainly by virtue of "rules" (formulated and interpreted by the members of admin cadre at the Ministry of

Establishment) rather than experience or expertise.

These "jack of all trades" type of civil servants are supposed to provide meaningful and pragmatic advisory services to the government, and are responsible for implementing those as well. But they can always take an escape route in the event of any policy failure, as it is the government which gives the final nod, which incidentally is based on the facts and figures presented by the civil servants.

This system has been going on since long, and we witnessed the worst outcomes of this system during the successive political governments when the politicisation and nepotism in civil service reached all time high. Sadly, it has not changed considerably even during this CTG.

Now, it is for the CTG to address the causes of adoption of poor policies as well as the failure of good policies, which lie mostly with the "man behind the machines." That is the reason the human resources issue has become so critical for the development of any organisation. The PSC is one institution where one may expect to see some qualitative changes, given the reforms it has undergone in recent months.

The mid and top-level management in the public sector need real changes, but PSC has very little or nothing to offer here with its current mandate.

Therefore, the CTG must act now. To start with, it can lift the barrier on entry into the ministries as deputy secretaries by lifting the 75% quota reserved for members belonging to the administration cadres. This is one of the major bottlenecks in getting the services of the "brighter" officers working in other cadres. (PSC results of BCS examinations in the last several years show that candidates having better results are no longer opting for the administration cadre). Therefore, the management positions in the specialised ministries and in different SOEs should be made open for competition, and the fittest should survive.

Second, the entry into the ministries should be kept open at all levels, not only at deputy secretary level. The government now exercises its power of presidential quota rule to induct any officer to higher positions, which often lacks transparency and gives rise to nepotism or other irregularities.

If the government makes all positions for deputy secretary and above open for fair competition, and some transparent selection

process is set, a much-desired professionalism would surely develop amongst the civil servants.

Third, the much talked about compulsory retirement rule after completion of 25 years of service should be rescinded immediately. This has paved the way for undue harassment of senior civil servants who are not willing to bow down to illegal pressure from the political powerhouses.

Many consider that this particular rule acts as the cornerstone of the corruption and inefficiency that reign in civil service now. It is not clear to me why the government would want to get rid of its more experienced staff if he or she is not charged with corruption or inefficiency. The rule must be scrapped to demonstrate that this CTG has a very clear intention of uprooting all evil from the whole governance process.

Fourth, the pay packages should be made more realistic. For instance, an officer of Grade 5 level (deputy secretary equivalent) draws a total monthly salary of around Tk. 20,000. One must admit that with that amount of money a decent living is almost impossible, given the high cost of living.

As there will be no savings, a civil servant, at the current pay

level, can never even dream of a house of his own during his service life, or a little luxury like having a reconditioned/used car to ensure secure and comfortable travelling.

This will never help to boost their confidence level and make them deliver their services with utmost diligence and integrity. If we look at the pre-liberation period, the starting pay for the CSP officers was Tk. 450, which was enough to pay for around 50 grams of gold at that time. Now, with

The current market price of 50 grams of gold is more than Tk. 100,000. So one need not guess why the brightest boys preferred civil service during those days, and could deliver what was asked from them. Apart from their high compensation packages, they were also allotted plots in posh residential areas like Gulshan or Dhanmondi.

We must appreciate the fact that financial well-being has a role to play in developing their professionalism. In contrast, have we offered anything similar to the civil servants in the post Bangladesh period? The answer is a big NO! Keeping these in view, the government must do something to upgrade the living standard of its civil servants. A very

effective and glowing example is our Southeast Asian neighbour -- Singapore.

Finally, the government should immediately constitute the long awaited economic pool, having its own independent rules of business and compensation packages and comprising officers with experience and background in trade and industry.

This key initiative must be materialised if we want to see Bangladesh elevated from LDC to a middle-income country within the next 10-15 years. These officers should be placed in the vital ministries, embassies and other public organisations dealing with finance, trade, internal resources, business promotion in overseas countries, attracting foreign and local investment, trade facilitation etc.

Regular training and adequate resources and logistics should be provided to these core officers for effective delivery of services. The recently formed Regulatory Reforms Commission and Better Business Forum can only bear fruit if we have a strong and capable set of managers in the public sector to implement the recommendations of these bodies.

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## The old and the new

**Individuals possess better economic judgements and skills than governments. Individuals know where and when to take risks. When they sustain loss, they redo their management methods or quit to stop further losses.**

**NIZAM AHMAD**

**M**ORE and more, we see the rise of two opposing political camps in Bangladesh. One is the old that wants to revive politics through immediate parliamentary polls. The other is the new that emerged after January 2007, and wishes never to return to old political dominance by dynasties, lawlessness, and the inability or reluctance of elected governments to bring reforms.

The "price of liberty is eternal vigilance," so said one of the great English philosophers, and we should never lower our guard even in the present situation when much is expected but little can transpire.

While the government's political reform agenda is commendable, its weakness lies in its handling of the economy. It continues to mismanage the economy and no political reform is sustainable without a satisfactory economy.

The government assigns economic experts and task forces, and holds discussions with the stakeholders, but all yield sorry

results. They tried the blame game. Blaming the "syndicate" was once everyone's favourite. Neither the experts nor the government have found any wilful manipulators of prices. They blame the international oil price hike and global shortages of food due to bio-fuels, cyclones, hoarding, profiteering, and the like.

The government has no clear explanation to our economic problems and it never will. However, as a solution to our economic ills, the government can leave the economy to the large informal black market to respond to the crisis and overcome it. The official word for this would be liberalisation. The simplest way to liberalise is to

legalise the informal economy and all related activities.

Liberalisation specifies that no security personnel would hinder informal economic activity or "monitor" markets. It implies that market prices are not controlled. It means eliminating the policy of seizing goods in the border regions or within a country. The liberalisation of the economy would let loose mass entrepreneurship which in turn would fulfil the demands of the economy.

"Entrepreneurs are blessed with a special courage to risk

their own resources," says Llewellyn Rockwell of Mises Institute in the US. Entrepreneurial freedom, the sovereignty of the producer and the consumer, if backed by sound money, can generate astonishing levels of productivity to meet the demands of a country.

Individuals possess better economic judgements and skills than governments. Individuals know where and when to take risks. When they sustain loss, they redo their management

methods or quit to stop further losses. Unfortunately, Bangladesh's academics, or even the media, have not found much to highlight the positive sides of the economic individual.

In economic matters, Bangladesh's intelligentsia focus on the power of the government. They project private enterprise as weak, unscrupulous, and without access to global resources or markets. This belief and the practice have created a vested business com-

munity that constantly seeks government favours and protection. To this class, having access to governments is more important and necessary than customer satisfaction in the market.

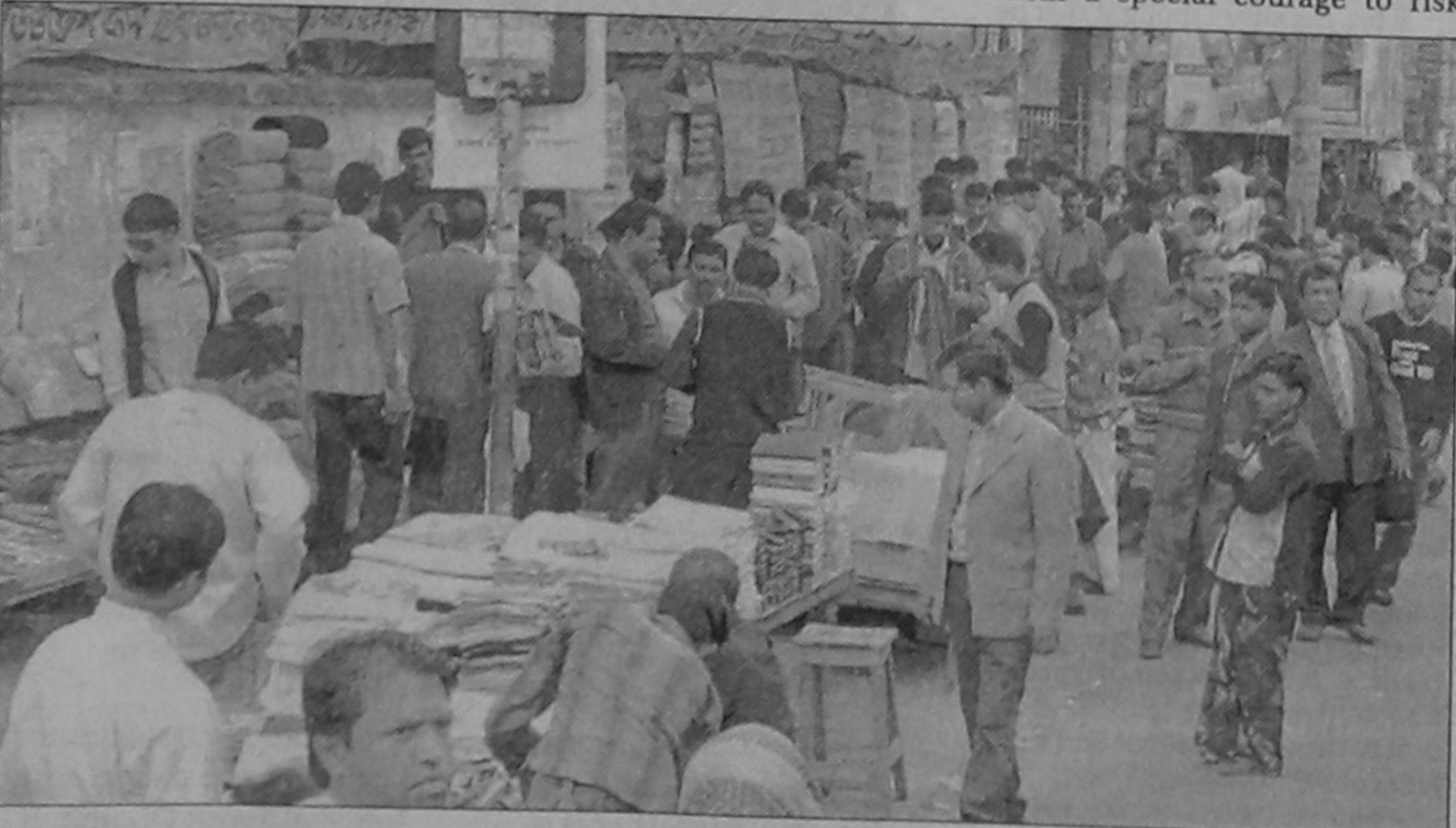
Protectionism, as they get, results in economic distortions and in the exploitation of labour. Protected exporters earn billions on labour living in city slums. Each year they forecast higher export figures, receive a host of awards and attention, but labour standards remain unchanged.

The government's poor wage

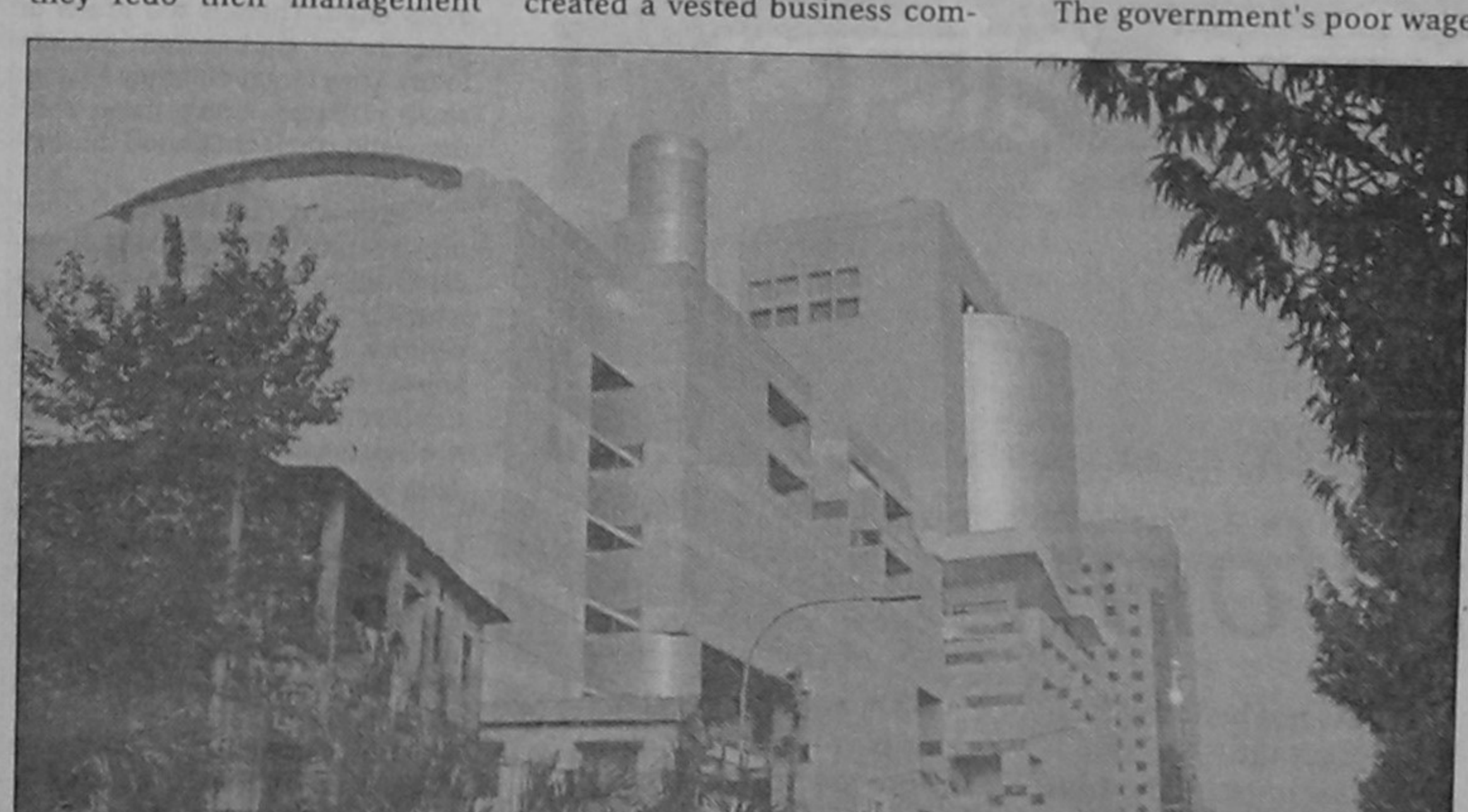
structure robs the lowly paid employees in SOEs of proper incentives to work. The wages they receive are too little to meet their family requirements. The government's irrational economics are responsible for nationwide corruption, but we blame the poorly paid who are compelled to be corrupt.

Western nations have prospered as their intelligentsia campaigned for economic freedom of the individual, not for economically powerful governments. While our media, academics, and some politicians seem to understand the need for political freedom of the citizen, they stay adamant on restricting his/her personal economic liberty. They favour governments and scorn markets. They misinterpret liberalisation.

Bangladesh's new political camp, the reformers, should realise that due to continued economic disappointments the politics of the old may stage a comeback. The old are politically experienced and can outwit the new unless the government takes a non-intervening economic role to revive the economy.



**Moving forward from here....**



**.... to here!**