

Ordinances can be starting point for promised change

All those in public interest should be kept

THE government is evidently in quite a race with time. It has to dispose of, one way or the other, the 122 ordinances left by the caretaker government. Given the time constraint and also the constitutional imperative for dealing with the ordinances, even if selectively, we can suggest a three-some approach for the government's consideration.

We are doing it in full realisation and knowledge, and also being driven by public interest considerations, that it is both a prerogative and responsibility of an elected government to ratify all ordinances made in public interest.

The overall approach has to be first-tracked to get the job done within the stipulated time period ending on February 24. For the sake of convenience but without compromising fundamental principles, let's categorise the 122 ordinances under three criteria: First, some of these having outlived their utility, it is just going through the motions to jettison them from the book. Secondly, and very pertinently, there are ordinances of purely legalistic nature, which if not ratified by the government, would amount to negating its constitutional continuity as these fundamentally relate to operationalising the election that helped usher in a parliament and transition to an elected government. In the third category, fall those ordinances which were need-based as far as the caretaker government went since these were warranted for a reformed and better functioning of the institutions.

The last-named include some very epoch-making, highly significant and long overdue measures, such as those providing for separation of judiciary from the executive, local government commission, right to information (RTI), human rights commission and the like.

The point we wish to drive home is that the ordinances that the MPs determine to be clearly in public interest and public welfare orientated; in one word, capable of securing public good, should be adopted straight away. For the ordinances regarded as being oriented to public good but still would need some modifications for improvement, these can be adopted subject to amendment at a future date.

Principally, as a time saving procedure the government would be well-advised to make up its mind on the ordinances it is 'convinced' should be adopted, those that must be enacted *per se* into law and those that need to be adopted but subject to amendment in future.

The overarching criterion, in our view, that should be applied is whether a measure was designed to improve governance and move the society forward or not. Why the time, energy and expertise that went into making some of the ordinances should go waste? By speedily and determinedly doing the job well, none other than the government itself will be the beneficiary.

Fishy business

Fishing in sewerage lagoons a public health disgrace

THERE are not words to express how appalled we are at the recent report of fish being farmed from sewerage lagoons finding their way into the market and subsequently the dinner tables of many unsuspecting city families.

It goes without saying that the fish in these lagoons cannot be eaten and that their appearance in fish markets poses a public health menace of the first degree. As in cases of food adulteration that have been reported in the past, this latest revelation exposes just how disgraceful the situation is and how much at risk we all are from the very food we eat.

There is enough blame to go around. In the first place, it is the responsibility of Dhaka Wasa to ensure that there are no fish in these sewerage lagoons. To the extent that it is not possible to completely eradicate the fish from the lagoons, it is still the authority's responsibility to patrol them and ensure that unscrupulous parties do not fish in them. Finally, the law enforcement authorities need to crack down on the traders in this illegal market so that consumers can be confident that any fish they buy from the market is safe.

There can be no scope for this kind of endangering of public health. Each and every party in any way connected with this disgusting trade needs to be apprehended and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

An example must be made of those who have such cavalier disregard for the public good. The government must make protection of the public its highest priority, and what could be more important than safe-guarding the food supply and ensuring that the food people eat is healthy and unharmed.

Equally important is to send a message to those who make a living preying on the public, purveying foul, adulterated, or spoiled items with callous indifference to the dangers to those who will consume them. There is no room in society for such poison peddlers and the sooner they are put out of action and made an example of, the better for all of us.

Starting over

It is only through mutually beneficial trade and commerce, and through close interactions of peoples between the two countries, that India and Bangladesh can once again become close friends and good neighbours. Historically and geographically entwined as we are, it is also our destiny to be so.

SHAMSUDDIN AHMED

IT is a pity that mutual mistrust and deep-seated animosity have characterised Indo-Bangladesh relations, much like Indo-Pakistan relations have come to be defined since partition in 1947. Ours should have been the friendliest, typical of two neighbours sharing so much in common.

How can we ever forget that it was our mutual love for democracy, freedom, equality and humanity that forged our relations under the extremely trying circumstances in 1971. Where is that India which sheltered our ten million refugees, and gave us all the support we needed to organise and arm ourselves to be able to fight the Pakistan occupation army and win our independence?

Where is that India whose soldiers fought and laid down their lives alongside our brave freedom fighters? It is not the same India we knew in 1971.

It is also not the same Bangladesh, which was so grateful to India for its role in 1971 that it could hardly fancy India being anything but friendly. The ground reality is that things have changed on both sides.

We no longer look towards India with the same amount of trust and dependability as we did in 1971. This, of course, has much to do with the rulers who appeared on the political scene after the tragic changeover in August 1975. First Khandaker Mushtaq and then Gen Zia ur Rahman, in a dramatic change of political ideology, began crafting

a policy of moving closer towards Pakistan, meaning that we shied away from India. Unfortunately, this has remained the state policy, except during AL rule.

The decades-long propaganda, anti-liberation political elements gaining political ascendancy, and AL having been kept on the sidelines during two decades of dictatorial rule have adversely impacted the psyche of this nation. A great majority of our people have learnt to dread India as a powerful neighbour intent on treating us as nothing more than a client state.

These people decry any move to improve our relations with India. When the AL government wants simply to renew a trade agreement with India, these people quickly describe the government action as a sell-out. When India asks for transit to move its goods to and from its north-eastern states, these people cry hoarse against transit being given on the baseless plea that this would jeopardise our security and sovereignty. Anything to do with India is suspect to these people.

India, too, has played into their hands by not doing enough to allay our fears and inspire our confidence. As a great regional power and a great democracy India our closest neighbour could and should have won us over to her side as a partner in socio-economic development. Sadly enough, it has done exactly the opposite of what it should have done.

The contentious issues between our two countries are such that they can be solved amicably in no time if only there is political



A new beginning?

goodwill on the part of India. There is no Kashmir between us, which is intractable. The problems which have soured our relations, are: Farakka, corridor to our enclaves, demarcation of unsettled land boundary, demarcation of maritime boundary, and the Talpatty issue.

These can be solved on the basis of equity and justice as per international law. If India can sign maritime boundary agreement with Myanmar, as reported in the media, there is no reason why such an agreement cannot be reached between India and Bangladesh. The present government should not waste time in initiating a dialogue with India at the highest political level to normalise our relations to our mutual benefit. With India as our friend we have a lot to gain. That we could not make much headway since we began our journey as a nation some 38 ago is partly because either we have looked away from India or India has shut the door on us.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina should take the bold step of not only normalising

our relations with India but also improving them to a level worthy of two neighbours committed to the ideals of freedom, liberty, fraternity and humanity.

There is no harm whatsoever in giving India transit facilities through Bangladesh, and also the use of our port facilities. But India must also allow our export and import to and from Bhutan and Nepal by giving us similar transit facilities.

As a good neighbour, India should not only open up its markets for our goods to enter there but also encourage its business entrepreneurs and industrialists to come forward and invest in Bangladesh. It is only through mutually beneficial trade and commerce, and through close interactions of peoples between the two countries, that India and Bangladesh can once again become close friends and good neighbours. Historically and geographically entwined as we are, it is also our destiny to be so.

Brig Gen Shamsuddin Ahmed (left), is a former Military Secretary to the President.

Why blame Kalyan alone?

Congress Muslims clambered over the dead stones of the Babri mosque in order to get promotions or places in the Rao cabinet. They sold Babri for a bowl of thin soup. If all is going to be forgotten, why should Kalyan Singh's sins be remembered? He was the opponent outside, not the enemy within.

M.J. AKBAR

DEATHBED repentance is a charming philosophy. Is it designed to fool God, society or oneself? Since God can't be taken for a ride, and it is pointless making a fool of yourself, it must be society. Poets and seers have noticed. Hence: *Aakhri waqt mein kya khaaq mussalman hong!* (Become a Muslim in my last breath?) And, more mundanely, *Nau sau choohe kha ke billi Haj ko chali!* (After eating 900 mice, the cat is going for Haj).

Apparently, plastic repentance still manages to generate a headline or two, as Kalyan Singh's sudden conversion to secularism indicates.

Kalyan Singh has not found God; he has only discovered a different denomination of voter. He has never asked UP Muslims for support, but thinks he knows how to: with emotionalism, not facts. He is titillating

them with false humility.

The facts might serve Kalyan Singh better. He was never guilty of hypocrisy. The BJP had Ayodhya at the top of its agenda. As BJP chief minister he could not have stopped the kar sewaks. He accepted the dilemma between party and state and resigned.

The true guilt lies with those who promised to protect the mosque and then were deliberately complicit in the demolition. Hypocrite-in-chief was the prime minister, PV Narasimha Rao, closely followed by his home minister S. B. Chavan. A central force was in place to stop the destruction; it was kept on the sidelines.

Rao, when asked, explained that he had been asleep during the day. Rao slept, Chavan snoozed. It was such an effective snooze that his son has been rewarded today with the leadership of Maharashtra. The cabinet and Congress party acquiesced in the Rao deception: the cabinet was

full of luminaries who would, doubtless, prefer their names to be omitted now from any column on the subject. Facts are injurious to votes.

Two politicians have the right to be critical of the Babri episode, despite later compromise: Ms. Sonia Gandhi and Mulayam Singh Yadav. The Congress may have been in power then, but Sonia Gandhi was not. She was deeply distressed by the demolition and did what she could to raise public awareness.

The other is Mulayam Singh Yadav. As chief minister before Kalyan Singh, he was unequivocal in its defence. Mayawati was not in power during the years of the Babri agitation.

The whole political class carefully ignores one fact, which would stare you in the face if you turned your face in the correct direction. Destruction of the mosque was only the beginning. The rest of a long story is the quiet construction of a temple at its site, although, in the courts, it is still disputed territory.

For 17 years, every political party has been in power in either Delhi or Lucknow. Each one has sanctioned or condoned the use of state funds to strengthen the security of this functioning temple at Ayodhya.

It makes sense to argue that any attempt to take a technical and legal view, and to stop the functioning of the temple, would

cause serious ethnic violence, so such facts are best ignored. If that is correct, then every party, however "secular" it may claim to be, agrees, in practice, with the BJP that a temple should be permitted on the site of the mosque. The law can take its own course, or no course at all; popular sentiment will prevail. Why then blame Kalyan Singh alone?

If the Muslims of UP want to hold Kalyan Singh accountable, why are they being so lenient to those who became cabinet ministers under Rao as representatives of the Muslim community? Why have they forgiven A. R. Antulay or Jaffar Sharief for not uttering a word of protest before Rao?

One Muslim cabinet minister would, lace his face with woe, suck tears from his stomach to the brim of his eyes, and say that his resignation letter was in his pocket. It is possible that the resignation letter is still in his pocket; it certainly did not come out during the three years left of Rao's term.

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US has to gain Afghan citizens' trust

The Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq has come to symbolise American abuse of some prisoners captured in Iraq, after the release of photos showing US soldiers sexually humiliating inmates at the facility. The scandal stoked support for the insurgency and was one of the biggest setbacks to the US military effort to win the peace in Iraq.

MATTHEW LEE

AS the Obama administration considers a troop buildup in Afghanistan, the top American military officer says the war will be lost if the US can't find a way to protect the Afghans and gain their trust.

"We can send more troops. We can kill or capture all the Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders we can find -- and we should. We can clear out havens and shut down the narcotics trade. But until we prove capable, with the help of our allies and Afghan partners, of safeguarding the population, we will never know a peaceful, prosperous Afghanistan," the Joint Chiefs chairman, Adm. Mike Mullen, wrote in a newspaper column.

Mullen also said that US forces have to gain the trust of the Afghans. The insurgency won't ever end if US forces accidentally kill civilians in the country or give people reasons to think badly of the US, according to Mullen's column posted on The Washington Post's Web site.

"That's why images of prisoner maltreatment at Abu Ghraib still serve as recruiting tools for al-Qaeda," Mullen said. "And it's why each civilian casualty for which we are even remotely responsible sets back our efforts to gain the confidence of the Afghan people months, if not years."

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Mullen's comments come as Pentagon military leaders are recommending that President Barack Obama overhaul US strategy in Afghanistan.

Obama has said the US will increase its attention on Afghanistan under his tenure as the US transitions out of Iraq. But the administration is debating how to stem the Taliban tide and tackle the endemic corruption in the Kabul government more



Winning hearts and minds?

than seven years after the 2001 invasion. There has been a downturn in relations between the two countries, with President Hamid Karzai complaining Saturday about "civilian casualties, arrests of Afghans, nightly raids on homes and the casualties they cause."

"Lose the people's trust, and we lose the war," Mullen said. "The strategy reviews for Afghanistan recognise this and seek military, economic, political, diplomatic and informational approaches to regaining that trust."

Mullen also said that the United States

must work throughout the region with other countries, including Pakistan, to combat extremists.

"Afghanistan and Pakistan are fighting a common foe," he said. "Extremists punish both nations for their attempts to resist an increasingly violent ideology. Any effective strategy must be inclusive of the security challenges in Afghanistan and Pakistan, if not also the countries surrounding them."

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