

## Govt to closely monitor service delivery in districts

*A thoughtful initiative that must be followed up*

THE government's initiative asking the deputy commissioners to file reports to the establishment secretary by the 10th of each month elaborating on anti-corruption activity, state of education and service delivery at the district and sub-district levels instantly strikes a responsive chord in us. These are not meant to be proforma reports, something that is refreshingly revealed through some excerpts of the letter which the establishment secretary had dispatched to the deputy commissioners.

The whole purpose behind the process being set afoot as we understand it is to establish answerability of the district and upazila administrations. The latter should be held accountable in the first place to the local people, civil society, public representatives, i.e. all stakeholders and, then to the establishment ministry as the controlling authority of the district/upazila executives. The constituency of the local administration is hardly aware of the different government agencies there are, or what facilities they provide, far less the services the designated officials are required to deliver and the procedures to obtain these. The DCs would now provide information charts to the people so that they are in a position to know how to go about demanding their rights and what their obligations to the state are.

Specifically on corruption, DCs have been advised to take a role in associating people to build an anti-corruption culture in their districts. As far as education goes, they are required to launch a social movement with the help and support of local public representatives, reputable community figures, NGO representatives, teachers and the taught, parents and guardians to ensure acceptable standards. The institutional limitations can be overcome by virtue of a cooperative environment. On primary healthcare, a good infrastructure is available, but what is lacking is human resource that refuses to disperse to the outlying areas.

We believe the move is in keeping with the Right to Information Act insofar as requiring the officials to inform people about the services being made available and their delivery to the people who demand these are concerned. It would be indeed gratifying if the district and upazila administrations were to have designated official spokesmen so that the people know where to knock for information. While being on the subject, could we urge the government to release the reports furnished by the DCs to the additional secretary concerned of the establishment ministry along with the evaluation reports of the latter thereon, at least the relevant excerpts of these to the press by way of public dissemination.

One final point, could the ministries, directorates, autonomous and semi-autonomous institutions embrace the information-sharing culture for the greater good of the nation?

## Boycotting Ahmadinejad in Geneva

*The West cannot eternally defend Israeli interests*

THE conference on racism that the United Nations has organised in Geneva has run into trouble. It should not have, considering that the issue on the table is of grave importance to the international community. But that does not appear to have been taken into account by the western, largely European, nations which chose to boycott the conference because they did not approve of Iranian President Ahmadinejad's criticism of Israel. The boycott has obviously left UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon feeling justifiably embarrassed. His ire shone through his remarks, in which he clearly notes that nations that could help to forge a path to a better future were not to be seen. And among those nations have been the United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, Poland and the Netherlands.

It is indeed regrettable that so many western nations have chosen to undermine a serious undertaking merely because of their antipathy to the Iranian leader. President Ahmadinejad did not exactly endear himself to people around the world when not long ago he spoke of the need, in his words, to wipe Israel off the face of the earth. That statement was roundly condemned, even by those who have regularly been outraged by Israel's aggressive behaviour over the years. But for some nations to ignore the principled criticism of Israel that men like Ahmadinejad and Venezuela's Hugo Chavez have been making and instead go for an unconditional defence of Israeli actions in the Middle East gravely damages the world's self-esteem. The ruthless manner in which Israeli forces have destroyed Gaza and indeed the continuous way in which they have been pushing Palestinians to the wall are issues that the global community can ignore at grave peril to its future. Israel's bellicosity is unacceptable. If the West persists in looking away from its misdemeanours, it ought not to expect a solution to the Palestine issue any time soon.

Where dealing with Iran is the matter, the new administration in Washington has clearly opted to do the right thing by reaching out to Tehran. For its part, Iran too must reciprocate the gesture. It does not help itself when it puts journalists like Roxana Saberi in jail on charges that are not substantiated. The most important point to remember, though (and that is for the countries which have boycotted the Geneva conference), is that ostracising a foreign leader can only lead to worse problems. Washington's decades-long sanctions against Cuba are a case in point.

## History and the search for scapegoats

In history, there will forever be the putatively wise blundering into disaster. And when they do, they will go looking for innocent lambs to sacrifice in order to save their own reputation.

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

HISTORY, for some men, has regularly been a search for scapegoats to explain away some monumental failures. It is a feature of the collective human experience that will likely not go away any time soon. Watch Saifur Rahman. He has, for yet one more time, decided to retire from politics. There can be nothing wrong with that, considering that Rahman has had a rather long day in the sun and considering too that his party is now in a state of bad health.

But what is surely not very comforting to hear is the former finance minister's pinning all the blame for the shame in which the Bangladesh Nationalist Party finds itself today on Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

With that one remark, Saifur Rahman has tried to gloss over the misdemeanour of the BNP and the grasping nature of its leading lights in the years they held political office, until the 2007 state of emergency came along. Not a word about the doings of his children or of the children of his party leader. Not a whisper about ministers and lawmakers who left the country gasping for breath.

All that matters now is to find someone to blame for everything that has gone wrong with the party. And the wrong the party did to the country? Ah, that is an irritating question that could only muddy the waters. Think of post-1971 Pakistan. Yahya Khan blamed Bhutto for the loss of East Pakistan. For his part, Bhutto thought Yahya was a bumpkin who had led the country to disaster. Neither man was willing to admit his own share in the making of the tragedy. Neither blamed the rapacious

Pakistan army for what had happened.

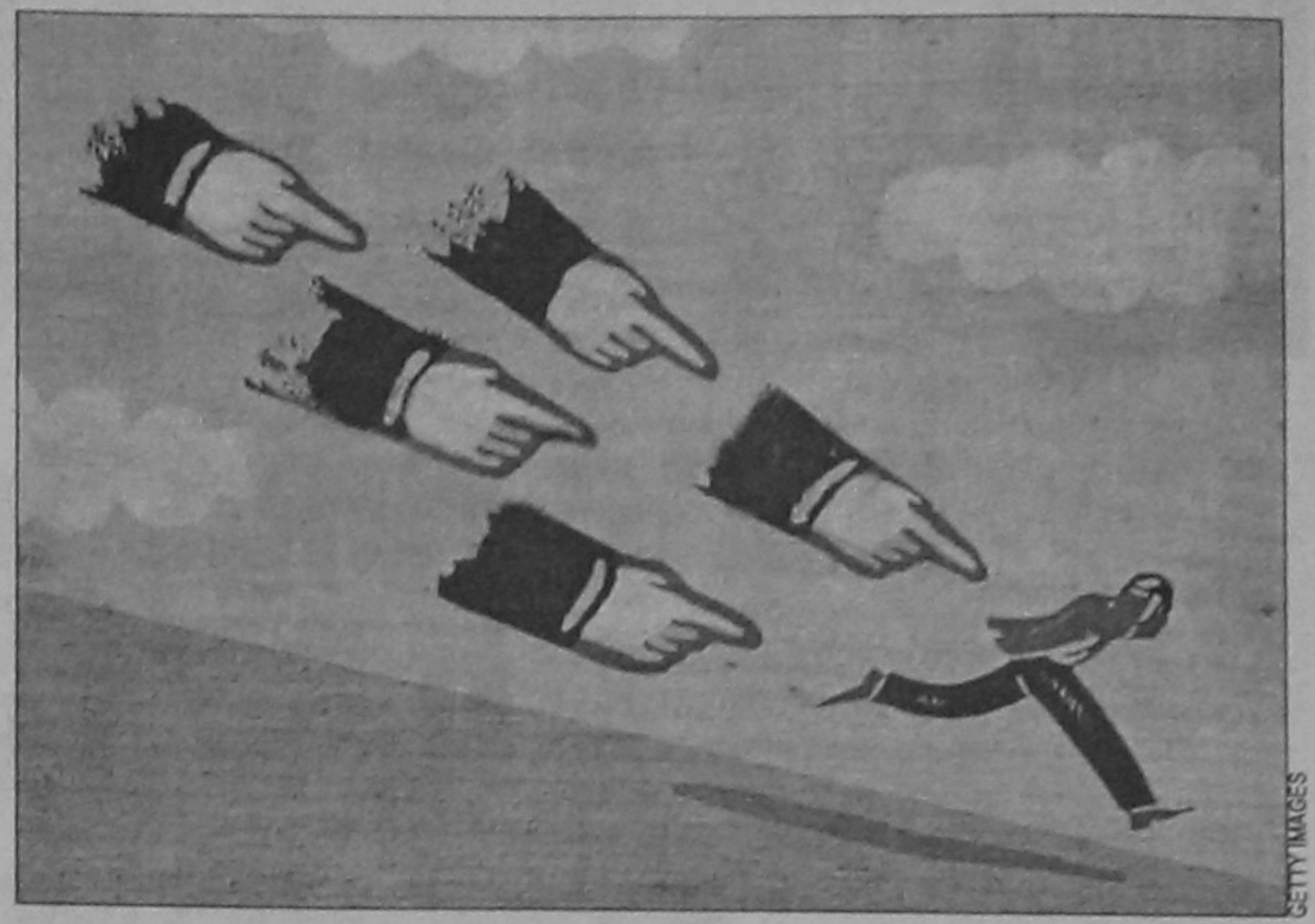
For all its devotion to democratic ideals, India took many steps backward when Indira Gandhi foisted a brutal state of emergency on it in 1975. Her ministers went sycophantic, encouraging her callow son Sanjay in committing the excesses that would lead to the Congress' electoral debacle two years later. And yet these sycophants, most of them, swiftly pinned the blame for all the emergency-era trouble on Sanjay Gandhi.

It was a useful way of handling the past, as Nikita Khrushchev would demonstrate in 1956 through lashing out at the dead Joseph Stalin. As a Stalin loyalist, Khrushchev faithfully carried out the supreme leader's orders on torture, executions and deportations. He was an accessory to Stalin's crimes and yet he felt not at all embarrassed when, at the 20th party congress, he decided that Stalin had to be made the scapegoat for the dark deeds of the past.

Lavrenti Beria, always in league with Khrushchev, was with alacrity dispatched. In September 1965, a well-laid out conspiracy led to the murder of six generals and undermined President Sukarno in Indonesia. The army lost little time in painting the entire macabre happening as a communist conspiracy. The scapegoat, the PKI leader D.N. Aidit, was brutally done away with.

Closer to our times, there is the image of Robert Mugabe outliving his usefulness and yet remaining adamant about not letting go of Zimbabwe. The country's problems, he believes, are not of his making but of its white minority.

The solution; run those whites out of



You are to blame!

their land and honey will flow all over.

Today it is high inflation, which sings through the dry, drooping grass. Travel back to the Vietnam War. There are, even today, ageing Americans who believe that it was the liberals and the media that made America lose the war. And Richard Nixon, deeply distrustful of newsmen and newspapers till his dying day, believed that they were responsible for the troubled times he spent in the White House. If anything went wrong, blame the media. That was policy.

These days you get to hear a lot about the battering the LITE is getting at the hands of the Sri Lankan army. Maybe the Tigers will bite the dust, maybe the conflict could yet go on for years. That is not the point. What is important is that the majority Sinhalese have always found in the LITE the perfect scapegoat for the long war that has gone on.

And yet it was S.D.R.D. Bandaranaike who in the 1950s initiated all those political

measures that would discriminate against Sri Lanka's Tamils, that would lead to the rise of the ruthless Velupillai Prabhakaran in the 1980s. The Chinese communists under Mao went looking for scapegoats every time disaster overtook the country. Lin Piao was accused, after his death in a mysterious plane crash, of revisionism. The respected Liu Shao-chi was carted off to prison in 1966. He died there, lonely and forlorn, in 1969.

In history, there will forever be the putatively wise blundering into disaster. And when they do, they will go looking for innocent lambs to sacrifice in order to save their own reputation. Remember Gamal Abdel Nasser? He lost the war with Israel in June 1967 and then blamed Field Marshal Abdel Hakim Amer. Poor Amer then took his own life. Or was murdered.

Syed Badrul Ahsan is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star. E-mail: bahsanraeq@yahoo.co.uk

## What about the poor?

Though the pledged funds amounting to \$1 trillion look substantial, only \$69 billion has been kept for about 96 poorer countries together with 49 Least Developed Countries (LDC) including Bangladesh.

HARUN UR RASHID

THE G-20 leaders met in London on April 2 to discuss plans to tackle the current global economic crisis. The G-20 is a group of the world's most powerful countries that together represent 85% of the world's economy.

The G-20 includes both major industrial powers -- G-8 -- and thirteen other emerging economic powers, such as China, India and Brazil (the 20 members are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, UK, USA and EU.)

G-20 is an informal grouping that was originally set up at a meeting of IMF in September 1999 in the wake of the Asian financial crisis in 1997. It was made clear by the 1997 crisis that emerging market economic powers needed to be included in discussions about the global financial system.

The G-20 has been given new impetus by the current economic meltdown, with the first meeting of heads of governments taking place in Washington during the Bush

administration (President Obama had been just elected and did not attend the meeting). The key pledges of the G-20 are:

- The injection of an additional \$1 trillion into the global economy through measures including \$500 billion increase in the funding available to cash-strapped IMF, an increase in the availability of money for developing countries through IMF's Special Drawing Rights to \$250 billion, and a total of \$250 billion set aside for trade assistance.
- Radical reform of the banking system.
- No non-cooperative tax havens to be allowed in any country. Those countries which do not comply with the rules will be blacklisted.
- Managing of toxic assets nationally.
- Tough new measures to regulate national financial institutions through establishment of international college of supervisors (financial stability body). Hedge funds are to come under regulatory control.
- The revamping of IMF and World Bank to ensure that nations such as China are given greater influence, and senior posi-

tions of IMF and World Bank will be open to candidates from the developing world.

- A continuing commitment to provide funds, such as the Millennium Development Goals.

Though the pledged funds amounting to \$1 trillion look substantial, only \$69 billion (\$50 billion for SDR and \$19 billion for trade assistance) has been kept for about 96 poorer countries together with 49 Least Developed Countries (LDC) including Bangladesh. Many are disappointed that the amount allocated is too meagre for these struggling countries. Much more funds should have been allocated for poorer countries as foreign aid to them could be slashed by 20% due to global recession.

The underlying reasons for the falling value of the dollar and the pound were not discussed. No concrete measures were adopted to curb the fluctuations in exchange rates, which have hit many poorer countries. Furthermore, China's proposal for a new international currency was also not discussed. Another matter that was not discussed was the impact of protectionist measures on the global economy, some of which G-20 have been adopted since November last year.

Financial experts say that it is very difficult to know how far the international financial system can be regulated. The current financial system is based on some cooperation and lots of competition. New rules may not be enforceable because they may be suitable to one area but not to another.

In future, governments will have to control or be able to influence financial markets through ownership of the banking system. Last year, governments were forced to stave off the collapse of many giant corporate bodies, including reputed banks in the US and Europe, by pumping public money into them.

The German government moved on April 9 to nationalise the stricken Hypo Real Estate bank, the first nationalisation since World War II. The diminishing role of national governments in the financial system has been reversed.

The greed and unethical activities of corporate leaders and negligence of regulatory bodies are some of the causes of this current economic crisis. The decision making process and the value framework supporting it were flawed. Social responsibility, ethical thinking, transparency and accountability must be the hallmark of the corporate leaders in future.

The G-20 decisions show that the world is itself in transition. The world has changed since 1945, when Big-2 (US and UK) used to decide the fate of the free world. By the end of 20th century, Big-2 became G-7, only to be replaced by G-20 by the 21st century. For example, China, and South Korea, apart from Japan, are now expected to provide a significant part of the funding to recapitalise the two global financial institutions.

Barister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## Run you run

Once I started understanding my body I realised it could do things that made me feel liberated more than I have ever been in my life. Like jump, walk, run and swim.

IFFAT NAWAZ

IT wasn't at the finish line when I felt my heart jump out of my body, but it was somewhere in the middle. Actually, it was in the beginning now that I think about it. Thousands of others around me stood together, running shoes, running shorts, with their best runner's faces on, and I was one of them. It was a marathon, 26.2 miles, or 42.2 kilometers, to conquer, and all I had to depend on were my legs and a mind that said I could do it.

It was an impossible dream when I thought about it earlier in my life while growing up in old Dhaka, where the extent of my athletic activity was climbing up and down the steep stairs of my grandparents' home. Or, at most, running through the fields in my school during a 15-minute lunch break to play tag. I was not an athlete

and I was never interested in exploring anything to do with sports because I knew I wasn't gifted in that area like most Bangladeshi women, neither did the environment around me encourage it. I mean I didn't even walk a block alone while growing up, so forget running.

Life took me away from Dhaka for a long while. And there, on the other side of the east, I accidentally bumped into a thing called my body. And once I started understanding my body I realised it could do things that made me feel liberated more than I have ever been in my life. Like jump, walk, run and swim. Hike mountains and climb rocks. Steer a kayak through white-water or scuba dive into the ocean. It was as if I had found a new self, and it took me years to adjust between the old me and this new me. Until I finally realised there was nothing called old and new, it was really

about the present.

And in between those realizations, one morning I had woken up knowing I wanted to run a marathon. So the training started, 5 miles to 10 miles, 10 miles to 20. Long runs during the weekends, and anticipation for the big day.

And the day came when a Bangladeshi girl (not the first by any means) ran the Marine Corps marathon all around Washington DC and Virginia, shoulder to shoulder with people of all shades and ages. But it really wasn't about that, which I realised after running about 15 miles, when it only became about me and the road and what I wanted from both. I realised there were tears pouring from my eyes, my body, that felt like a machine, was completely driven by a mind that was screaming cheers.

Running in front of the Pentagon, Washington monument, Jefferson and Lincoln memorials I could only think of my Bangladeshi roots and my identity that relates to it all. Every step I took, I equaled to every step I should have taken but couldn't while I was in Bangladesh. I was making up for missed steps, for missed chances, missing courage.

When I finished I cried, but no one looked at me because most people cry when they cross that finish line. I hugged the marine officer who gave me my medal. And surprising myself I walked home (another 3 miles from the finish line) craving daal, bhaat and alu bharta.

It's not much I know, and this might be a small experience amongst many great ones, but it made me want to tell every Bangladeshi woman to get out on our roads, our fields, our land and run, walk, and feel their legs stretching while their minds grow. I could feel their joints reinventing themselves, their bodies breathing at a new pace, their minds more alert, their smiles more bright, if they could only have the opportunity to freely, without any harassment, run, jog, walk, bike and understand the power of physical liberation. Because all of us deserve it and are capable of finding it, we just need the chance.

So this is a small beginning with a humble request, come out and play with me. It's been so long, leave your fears behind, embrace the road, you won't be alone, I will be waiting.

Iffat Nawaz is a writer and Director for Dnshiptat.