

Effective district level administration

Coordination and political non-interference the key

THE prime minister's directives to deputy commissioners at the ongoing 3-day conference for DCs at the PMO struck the right note. It is indeed at the district level that good governance needs to be delivered, and when it comes to providing for the welfare of the common people the role of the DCs is more than crucial; it is indispensable.

Keeping this in mind, any efforts directed towards more efficient delivery of services at the district level are to be welcomed. The PM made clear that the government intends to stand alongside the DCs and give them whatever assistance they need in order to accomplish their aims. We applaud the government's stated commitment in this regard and trust that it will be fulfilled on the ground.

Specifically, the coordination that the PM spoke of between the DCs and superintendents of police and the upazila nirbahi officers is most definitely the key to better performance. The challenges that officials face from militancy to crime to development cannot be viewed in isolation from one another. The issues are inextricably linked, and, as a result, working to eradicate crime and militancy and to thereby create an environment conducive for development must be done in a coordinated manner.

The DC must have an overall vision of the challenges that he or she will face and attempt to put in place an all-inclusive plan to address these issues in a holistic fashion. A piecemeal solution will not be sufficient.

To this end, what is needed most of all is cooperation and coordination between the DCs, SPs and UNOs. Only then can any real headway be expected to be made on the vital issues of law and order, internal security, corruption, service delivery and development. Addressing them in a compartmentalised manner, as has been the norm, will ultimately deliver only partial benefits.

Lastly, it is important that the district administration be free to do their jobs without interference from politicians, and that the office be kept aloof from politicisation and partisanship. If the government is truly sincere about empowering the DCs and tackling these long-standing issues at the district level it will have to ensure that they can perform their duties without hassle from political players.

Drug testing inadequacies

The gaps must be filled in urgently

THE paracetamol syrup tragedy which caused no fewer than 25 child deaths has brought to the fore the issue of how well equipped the Drug Administration is to deal with spurious and substandard medicines posing a grave threat to public health.

The ground reality is that the Drug Administration has to rely on only two drug testing laboratories to make sure that poor quality drugs do not enter the market. But as the deaths of the babies have proved beyond any iota of doubt, the two laboratories fall far short of what has to be done to stop marketing of drugs containing toxic substances.

The Drug Administration is also performing well below the required level as far as supervision of the procurement of raw materials by the drug manufacturers is concerned. It has only 24 supervisors against the sanctioned posts of 45. It shows that supervision of the raw material procurement process has never been treated as a matter of priority. And we have just seen what such lax supervision can lead to. Children have been murdered through supplying drugs unfit for human consumption. And the saddest part of the story is that similar deaths occurred in the early nineties too, but the Drug Administration has not bothered to do anything to stop repetition of the tragedy.

It is really disturbing to learn that the government-run drug testing laboratory at Mohakhali does not have the modern equipment and trained manpower required to handle an issue as sensitive as clearing drugs for use by patients. Now, the question is if the laboratory does not have the required facilities, how can it justify its existence? Obviously, it is not an area where shoddy or slipshod work is permitted. And how can the Drug Administration refute the popular notion created by the recent deaths that it has no concern for human lives? True, the manufacturer of the poisonous drug is the real culprit here, but how can the Drug Administration avoid the responsibility of protecting people from the hands of highly unscrupulous manufacturers?

So, the focus should be as much on capacity building in testing drugs as on punishing the murderers masquerading as drug manufacturers. The number of drug testing laboratories needs to be increased immediately to handle the huge load of work created for them by our booming pharmaceutical business. At the same time, the two existing laboratories must be equipped with all the modern facilities, so that substandard stuff does not enter the market.

Revisiting 1/11

While there can be no two opinions about the need for 1/11 there should certainly be open, free and frank discussions as to whether everything that followed and the manner in which they came about should have been allowed at all.

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WE revisit 1/11 this week once again and will do so for several more weeks. This has been, and will continue to be, a much talked about issue. However, not surprisingly, the matter continues to be projected in a very subjective manner.

While there can be no two opinions about the need for 1/11 there should certainly be open, free and frank discussions as to whether everything that followed and the manner in which they came about should have been allowed at all. It is important to analyse the aftermath too. There is also need for serious introspection about what compelled 1/11 in the first place.

It is not surprising to hear politician belonging to both the major parties threaten to take certain important personalities associated with, or responsible for, bringing about 1/11 and for the aftermath, to court. A case has already been instituted against General Moeen U. Ahmed for quoting a wrong figure while trying to project the level of alleged corruption of a particular ministry.

While it is one's inalienable right to seek redress of law, what one finds disconcerting is the dig at the armed forces by some quarters. Change in tone of some of the think tanks is very noticeable too, which has changed to one of questioning the rationale of the army to focus on external threats, since, according to them, there is none. We will have more to say in this regard in future.

It was cautioned in these very columns little more than two years ago, following the

imposition of emergency in January 2007, that the armed forces not be overjoyed at the public elation on their role in preventing the country going over the brink.

It is very important for the men in uniform to remember that, "Our God and soldiers we like to adore, just at the brink of ruin and not before, The danger past, both are alike required; God is forgotten and soldier slighted."

And this is exactly what is happening. We had cautioned against any slip-up since those would be laid at the doors of the military, as it had played the catalytic role for 1/11. And some are going hammer and tongs against the DGFI, perhaps rightly so, for the sufferings they are alleged to have inflicted on some of those apprehended under the anti-corruption drive.

Some are holding the army responsible for all that happened on January 11, 2007, and everything since then up to the election. What is most disturbing is that its integrity is being questioned and direct accusation of corruption is being levelled against the military. To quote an eminent lawyer who, in an interview to a local English daily newspaper some time back, had said: "You can't imagine how much money people in the army have made in the name of anti-corruption." These are grave allegations that need to be taken very seriously.

One is not surprised that some are calling for the head of the former army chief for his role in 1/11. Perhaps the general's revelation in his second book has provided the fodder for the critics.

It was interesting to see a segment of the intellectuals, businessmen and media try to



Invitation for 1/11.

surpass one another by indulging in some rather brazen and quite unnecessary adulation of the CAS. Some of them have, predictably, either gone quiet or changed their stance.

There was a time in the two years of the erstwhile caretaker government when some intellectuals gave space to the CAS to propagate a "new brand of democracy" for Bangladesh; and this we had vehemently objected. And we were not surprised by the painstaking effort of certain scholars and journalists, given their particular psychological dispensation, to convince the public of the need to accord a role to the armed forces in the governance of the country. And that too was rejected out of hand in this very column.

And, of course, not to be outdone, a section of the business community took it upon themselves to bestow special honour to the army chief for his role in enhancing the business opportunity in the country. What

the army chief had to do with the country's commerce one cannot make out.

The former army chief is being held responsible for the two most important and critical matters that the caretaker government of Fakhruddin Ahmad promised but failed to deliver. We will address in detail the issues of anti-corruption and political reform in the following weeks, but suffice it to say that the ex-chief read too much into the public euphoria following the changes of January 11, 2007, and ill-advisedly assumed the role of the back seat driver of the Fakhruddin government. This should never have happened.

However, all that happened and did not happen must not dilute the fact that the country got a nearly foolproof voter list and NID card as a spin-off, and an election to whose transparency and fairness all the observers have vouched for.

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AL council session

There appears to have been some controversy over the method of election (by a simple voice vote or show of hands). The grassroots level leaders felt somewhat ignored. With the issue of strengthening local government still not settled such a development needs immediate and serious attention of the high command of AL.

A.B.M.S ZAHUR

AL completed its national council session through re-electing Sheikh Hasina as its party president and electing Syed Ashrafur Islam as general secretary. While it was clear beforehand that Sheikh Hasina would be re-elected, Syed Ashrafur Islam got the edge over Obaidul Quader because of his invaluable contribution to the party after 1/11 political changeover.

However, there appears to have been some controversy over the method of election (by a simple voice vote or show of hands). The grassroots level leaders felt somewhat ignored. With the issue of strengthening local government still not settled such a development needs immediate and serious attention of the high command of AL.

The AL national council empowered the newly elected president and the general secretary to choose leaders for 45 posts in the 73-member ALCWC. The 45 posts include the 13-member party presidium, and 31 departmental secretaries. Furthermore, the council delegated the power to incorporate any further change (if necessary) in the party's declaration and constitution to the president.

As per Article 21 of the AL constitution, the president, presidium members, general secretary, departmental secretaries and the treasurer must be elected by the triennial council. So far, nobody has filed any application for candidacy. Instead, a proposal has been made to empower the newly elected president and general secretary to choose the leaders for the rest of the posts. It appears to be a good proposal in view of the time constraint and some controversy

over "reformists."

The amended constitution and declaration were ratified, and the budget for the next three years was approved in the meeting. In such meetings there can hardly be a consensus. There may be diverse opinions. It is clear that AL will have to face a number of challenges in the near future. Among them are internal dissensions, student politics, distribution of power between MPs and local government representatives, and attaining vision 2021.

In the current situation none appears to be more suitable than Sheikh Hasina to hold the post of president. Syed Ashrafur Islam's capacity has already been reflected well in his handling the highly critical situation after 1/11. Thus, the choice for both the posts appears to be fair.

The newly elected general secretary has rightly advised his party men that there is not much scope for complacency for the AL. They will have to move forward carefully and vigorously. The AL must understand that the nation expects much from it, as the party is the only truly democratic party and the only hope for democracy in future. Thus, it must not spare any pains to concentrate on the welfare of the people who brought it to power.

The senior leaders of AL must encourage the upcoming young leaders instead of finding their faults. The young and inexperi-

enced may commit mistakes and omissions. The senior leaders must try to rectify them. Sheikh Hasina has correctly diagnosed that one of the main reasons for the debate in the 2001 election was the frustration of young and youngish leaders at being ignored. In the 2008 election these leaders played a wonderful role in bringing AL to regain power. If these leaders are not encouraged AL may suffer seriously for lack of appropriate leaders to strengthen democracy in future.

Sheikh Hasina has remained the symbol of unity of the party since 1981 and, as the prime minister, she has to take the initiative to mellow down the differences with the opposition. The number of seats of the opposition in the parliament must not prompt her to behave like a dictator. She should admonish her colleagues to be more prudent in their words and deeds.

She must not ignore the importance of the opposition. In all major issues she must make sincere and serious effort to bring them near. The gesture of the leader of the opposition to send a three-member team to the council meeting should be appreciated.

We hope that the AL will do well under the leadership and guidance of Sheikh Hasina in future, and whatever dissatisfactions and frustrations exist will be wiped out soon.

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Africa's new path

One of the great under-reported stories of the last decade has been the rise of this new Africa. In 2007, before the economic crisis hit, 37 countries on the continent were growing at 4 percent a year or more, and 34 countries there are classified by Freedom House as "free" or "partly free."

FAREED ZAKARIA

PRESIDENT Obama was right to give his recent address in Ghana, highlighting an African success story rather than casting his speech against the backdrop of poverty and pity. One of the great under-reported stories of the last decade has been the rise of this new Africa. In 2007, before the economic crisis hit, 37 countries on the continent were growing at 4 percent a year or more, and 34 countries there are classified by Freedom House as "free" or "partly free." The OECD reports that, in a first, Africa gets more money from investors than from foreign aid. The continent remains poor, disease-stricken, and often poorly governed. But for the first time in a long time, there is forward momentum.

Nowhere is this truer than in Rwanda. If ever a nation seemed destined to fail, it was Rwanda. A little more than 15 years ago, the country suffered the most brutal genocide since the Holocaust. In 100 days, Hutu mobs slaughtered more than 800,000 Tutsis, one tenth of the population, a literal decimation.

Many thought Rwanda would plunge into a death spiral like other "post-conflict" countries, such as Somalia.

In fact, Rwanda has become a model for the African renaissance. It is now stable, well ordered, and being rebuilt every month. Average incomes have increased by 30 percent. The country has a national health-care system, burgeoning countrywide education, and much less corruption than is usual in Africa. It is becoming increasingly attractive to corporations and tourists. In 2007, Fortune published an article titled "Why CEOs Love Rwanda." The heads of Starbucks, Google, and Costco are among the country's supporters.

Ask anyone who has studied Rwanda -- African or Westerner -- what its secret is and they will say leadership, by which they mean Paul Kagame. Kagame commanded the rebel army that ended the genocide, and has been a driving force in Rwandan politics ever since. His guiding philosophy is self-reliance, which means he shares in the critiques of foreign aid, such as the one recently penned by Zambian economist Dambisa Moyo.

"The debate about good and bad aid misses the point," he said to me while he visited New York last week. "Aid must do things that wean people off aid -- if not, aid is a failure." He acknowledged that foreign aid makes up 50 percent of his own budget but pointed out that the number had been 85 percent, and has been dropping steadily.

Kagame didn't rely on outsiders to build his crucial success, which was political reconciliation. He started out by following the standard model in which perpetrators of violence were prosecuted and then jailed. "But soon we had 130,000 in jail -- and many more [suspects] outside," Kagame said. "The genocide in our country involved a huge percentage of our population, both in terms of those who were killed and those who killed."

So Kagame arrived at the idea of using an indigenous system -- gacaca courts, essentially local village councils where people confess and are punished but are mostly forgiven and reintegrated into the communities from which they came. As The New Yorker's Philip Gourevitch has pointed out, this has led to a unique situation among post-genocide countries. In Germany, Jews fled (to America and Israel). In the Balkans, the various sides were separated into ethnic enclaves or distinct nations. But in Rwanda, killers and the relatives of their victims live side by side, in every village in the country, and together are building their future.

There is an edge to Kagame's independence. He is dismissive of international

advice, pointing out that Western experts told him his reconciliation plans were flawed and that his country was "unviable" economically. He has fueled the conflict in neighbouring Congo by supporting local warlords and militias, and he accuses United Nations peacekeepers of exacerbating the problems there. He is not a supporter of the International Criminal Court, even though it indicted Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for actions that resemble, in smaller degree, the genocide in Rwanda.

"International justice is a fraud," Kagame said to me, arguing that French officials, for instance, should be tried for helping to train and arm the Hutu-dominated military that carried out the Rwandan genocide. "Why does it appear strange that justice would apply to somebody in Europe who has a responsibility? They can never do wrong, therefore justice does not apply."

Kagame has his faults. Though elected, he rules like an authoritarian. But in his emphasis on self-reliance he provides an intriguing picture of what a more hopeful African future might look like -- driven by capitalism, pride, indigenous traditions, and a prickly nationalism that insists on finding its own path to success.

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