

Obdurate bureaucracy imperils democracy

Although the politicians cannot absolve themselves of their faults, bureaucrats, by dint of their knowledge of rules of business and gift of gab, often suggest that their political colleagues in the government commit themselves to activities that appear rosy for the country and for themselves. And, most often, the politicians fall prey to this sinister design.

Z.A. KHAN

RECENTLY, *The Daily Star* conducted an opinion poll to ascertain peoples' response to the government's mulling over clipping the wings of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) by curbing its authority to investigate allegations against three categories of "special citizens." The response, as expected, was negative.

The authorising of a mandatory role to lawmakers in the upazila administration was not acceptable to most people. The saga of sacking and quick re-instating of three judges drew flak from the Bar, the Bench and the people at large. Our memory is not short enough to forget the Janata Mancha episode, which was organised by the bureaucracy.

Although 10 months are not enough to implement the pledges, these instances cast shadows of despair and frustration. Why is this happening despite the huge support that the Awami League got in the last election? Is it because of the lawmakers' inclination to make hay while the sun shines by adopting free style wheeling dealing ways? Or could it be because the government is not informed about the sliding politico-economic and law and order situation by the concerned organs of the government? Who is in charge of the organs of the government?

The people voted AL to power on the assurance that it will bring about changes for the better, but the signs of that are yet to surface. They think that the government has been made to reverse its election pledges so that lawmakers and the party rank and file can eat the cake and have it too. The political leadership of AL cannot be blamed for the prevailing state of affairs.

It is said that the bureaucracy is an essential adjunct for good governance, which propels democracy and fuels development. Can we apportion a part of the blame on the bureaucracy for creating impediments in the way of implementation of the pledges?

One can sense bonhomie between the lawmakers and the bureaucracy for reasons not too difficult to find. This mutual back-scratching stems from politicians' (in the government) dependence on the bureaucracy to support their development schemes, which is their passport to re-election.

In today's environment, nobody believes in free lunch and, therefore, the bureaucracy extracts heavy toll from the politicians, who respond obligingly. This makes them power-pushers and at the same time helps them pocket pay-offs.

There are umpteen examples where bureaucracy misguided the political government when it (bureaucracy) was not kept in good humour. Although the



File work says it all!

politicians cannot absolve themselves of their faults, bureaucrats, by dint of their knowledge of rules of business and gift of gab, often suggest that their political colleagues in the government commit themselves to activities that appear rosy for the country and for themselves. And, most often, the politicians fall prey to this sinister design.

Bureaucrats are generally intelligent and well conversant with the rules of business, while their political colleagues in the government may not be so. Therefore, their dependence on the bureaucracy for administrative support to implement their agenda is enormous. It is not difficult for the relatively eloquent bureaucrats to feel their political colleagues' nervousness with regard to handling initiatives that focus on their constituency's demands but are not

permissible within rules.

The bureaucrats in these instances advise lawmakers as to how to fulfill their desire for development of their area and at the same time to make personal gains. If ever any digression from the rules is detected, the elusive bureaucrats escape without eliciting public wrath while the politicians are obliged to face the repercussions.

Bangladesh is ruled by an elitist oligarchy. Our politics and governance have become the domain of a narrow elite. While wealth is considered as an essential ingredient for participation in politics, flattery is considered as a stock in trade for flourishing of bureaucracy. If this corporate arrangement is allowed to take root then good governance will become a far cry.

Experience reveals that if the former

tries to assert, the latter plays truant with the tasks assigned so that delay occurs in the execution, which culminates in conflict between them. This calls for administration of a healing touch.

Does this situation call for construction of a bridge of friendship between the two sides or resurrection of Good Samaritan values to give fillip to the obligations to perform? To my understanding, creation and protection of the organs of the good governance should be accorded priority.

Most of the rules of business, which are considered as gospels of good governance, were framed during the British Raj to exploit the subjects. So, the ramifications of these rules on our prevailing socio-economic conditions and political aspirations should be considered immediately.

Differences on political issues are transitory, they can be resolved with time. Our concern should be to see them in perspective against the background of affinity that we as a nation should take pride in. Those in power by the grace of electorate are temporarily in charge of affairs but have no right to shirk the responsibility of keeping the nation together on the issues that may disturb the administration, especially when the servants of the republic treat them from partisan points of view for personal benefit. This is the legacy of good governance which history will retain to open again when irritants are removed.

One may consider providing training to the lawmakers about rules of business at the behest of the Jatiya Shangshad so that the bureaucracy's cutting edge in this regard is blunted. It must be ensured that whims of the politicians do not inhibit the careers of the bureaucrats. There must be close understanding and cohesion between these two vital stakeholders responsible for good governance.

Political parties should caution their rank and file not to express any hasty judgment on the performance of the party in power. The government should never impose any stifling condition on the opposition that may jeopardise the possibility of cooperation.

These are situations that the bureaucracy takes advantage of. So, political parties should inculcate the habit of taking initiatives that focus on encouraging engagement in dialogue to remove apprehension about government moves.

Faulty or partisan interpretation of government orders or rules by the bureaucracy may create a crack, which may eventually snowball into crumbling of the institutional structure. So the bureaucracy should be motivated through fair governance not to indulge in activities that may not augur well for its sustenance.

The government and the opposition should endure with good grace any constructive criticism, and act upon it to foster confidence and cooperation. This will deter the bureaucracy from impeding the process of democracy and development. Let the servants of the republic discharge their responsibilities without partisan bias and let the politicians convey their ignorance and dependence on them because the tax-payers expect them to do so.

A mechanism should be evolved to monitor violations of the rules of business. Let us resolve to rebuild the organs of our government by reforming and revamping the old rules that provide loopholes for flattery and violations for personal gains, which have prompted the bureaucracy to take advantage to meet their personal ends.

Z.A. Khan is a former Director General of Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies.

Secret diplomacy on Kashmir

The Indian minister disclosed that secret negotiations were going on between India and Pakistan on Kashmir. He also said: "We are working on a solution that will satisfy both sides and will be good for the Kashmiris."

M.B. NAQVI

LAST week some Kashmir newspapers reported with approval some remarks that India's Home Minister, P. Chidambaram had made in Srinagar. The Indian minister disclosed that secret negotiations were going on between India and Pakistan on Kashmir. He also said: "We are working on a solution that will satisfy both sides and will be good for the Kashmiris."

It is not easy to be optimistic. Kashmir has been an issue of dispute for 62 years. It is because of this that Pakistan says that the first thing is to solve the Kashmir problem. Earlier, the solution for Pakistan lay in a referendum in Kashmir to decide whether it will remain in India or will opt for Pakistan. The Indians, although they had at first accepted the proposal of a plebiscite, later incorporated Kashmir into India and made it an integral part of India. After this India has always said it was no longer able to discuss Kashmir's future; it was a closed transaction. That was that. Pakistan continued to say for umpteen years that unless the Kashmir dispute was solved there could be no friendship between Pakistan and India.

The Indians and Pakistanis have debated on and about Kashmir for 62

years and could not compromise. This dispute has been blocking all that India wants from Pakistan, and vice-versa. There have been a series of negotiations between India and Pakistan since the 1950s. In 1963-64, Bhutto-Swaran Singh talks had gone through six rounds, but failed. Only two agreements between India and Pakistan have so far been struck. One is Indus Water Treaty and the second is Shimla Agreement, 1972.

As for the Indus waters question is concerned, they were early days and there was enough common sense that led to a solution with the help of World Bank. The problem was resolved until now, when it is threatening to become a much bigger dispute. The Shimla Agreement was more or less dictated by the Indians because Pakistan was a defeated country in a war and had prisoners of war in India's custody, and there also was some territory in West Pakistan that India was occupying. Pakistan had to retrieve both by agreeing to India's terms.

The Indo-Pakistan negotiations again started in 1997, when an Indian delegation came to Pakistan and agreed on creating a format of eight groups to settle Indo-Pakistan disputes, in which water and nuclear weapons were not included.

Again, several rounds were gone through but nothing worked out. Then

two important occasions arose: one in 1999 when Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Indian PM, came to Lahore on a bus. He went to Minar-e-Pakistan and wrote to the effect that India accepted Pakistan with its heart as a legitimate state. The two prime ministers, Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif, issued a Lahore Declaration that was to restart the talks and chart a way to peaceful coexistence.

Lahore Declaration was sabotaged by the Kargil adventure, that had almost started another Indo-Pakistan war, by Pakistani General Pervez Musharraf the same year. This was avoided with US help. That left a very bad taste in everyone's mouth because it was so pointless. Pakistan had not wanted a war but would have got one if the Americans had not intervened and mediated a solution.

But remember, much of the 1990s was a period when Pakistan was doing its utmost in Kashmir to make India's hold unstable and create conditions in which the Indians would perhaps agree to sort out other problems with Pakistan, including Kashmir. But the jihadis in Kashmir went a step further and also attacked India's Parliament.

That brought India's notional invasion of Pakistan, in which India's forces were concentrated on Pakistan's borders and threatened invasion. Again the Americans and other western countries seem to have helped and, for good measure, General Pervez Musharraf, then president, satisfied the Indians by promising not to allow Pakistan territory to be used against India. The details of the mediation do not concern us but American President Bill Clinton played a notable part.

Finally, talks restarted in 2004. The result was the same: failure. Meanwhile, Musharraf, for obscure reasons, was desperate that there should be a solution that would unlock other disputes too. Some of these disputes -- Sir Creek, Siachin Glacier and two water-related disputes -- could easily be solved with a modicum of goodwill on both sides. But Kashmir stood in the way.

Musharraf, at a later stage, came up with his own ideas on how the talks could succeed. He made a five-point proposal to India, in which a Kashmir solution was suggested. Musharraf's solution was something that the Indians should have jumped to accept.

Basically, he allowed Kashmir's division line to be made permanent, and this border was to be as peaceful as if it did not exist. There would be cross-border traffic and cross-border trade, and it would have allowed people to come and go across the border without raising the question of the legitimacy of the division of Kashmir. Indians, for obscure reasons, balked. They let go an opportunity that they later seem to have regretted. This was nothing less than Pakistan's recognition of India's sovereignty over the parts it is occupying today.

If the two parties could agree upon this solution of Kashmir, other smaller problems could be easily resolved. There would then be goodwill enough. But in the meantime, two bigger issues have arisen on which there have been no talks so far.

One is the question of water in the context of climate change that is taking place. The glaciers in Kashmir, from which six rivers of Pakistan and India originate, are



Peace, not long in coming?

melting. This will create more water in the shorter term and much less water in the longer term. The water dispute has now to be seen in a much wider context, and has to be sorted out.

The second dispute concerns nuclear weapons. So long as nuclear weapons are at the ready in India, Pakistanis cannot be reassured and live peacefully with Indians. Similarly, Indians cannot live peacefully if Pakistan has nuclear weapons pointing at India. The two sides have continued an arms race for long, and seem totally unable to agree to any talks for strategic limitation of these.

Indians refuse to equate their nuclear deterrents with Pakistan's; they say they have a larger world role, and also China, to take care of. Pakistan is frank and says

that all its nuclear weapons are meant for India. So long as these two nuclear deterrents face each other, and there are no talks on the subject, the deadlock between the two countries will continue.

But hope need not be given up entirely. There are ways in which such matters can be resolved. The aim has to be larger: a rapprochement between India and Pakistan, one that takes Bangladesh and other South Asian countries in its scope. If they can create an all round détente, and then take it upward into friendship, most matters can be resolved. Pakistan, perhaps then, will be ready to give India transit rights to Afghanistan and Central Asia, for which New Delhi pines.

M.B. Naqvi is a leading Pakistani columnist.

A visit to Germany



A friend gave me a warning when he heard I was going on a book tour of Germany.

"If I were you, I wouldn't mention the war," he said. "They're probably still sensitive about it."

I told him that his advice was imbecilic.

"Thanks," he replied. "Always happy to help."

In the event, it was hard to imagine any of the discussions I had on route, which were mainly with flight attendants, veering onto the subject of World War II. "Chicken or fish? And what do you think about the rise of Socialist

Nazism in the 1930s?"

Arriving at a German hotel at dawn, I went straight to the dining room to find a stand of brochures, which I read over breakfast -- sausages, of course.

"Come and see where Hitler had lunch," said one.

Another offered (this is not a joke) a scenic bicycle tour of the Dachau concentration camp.

A third offered The Third Reich Tour with Lunch and Two Types of Beer.

Modern Germans are sophisticated, cool, laid-back people who are totally upfront about the sins of their forebears.

"Hitler was SUCH a monster," they say. "Have another sausage."

What a contrast to Asia. In the east, it is considered bad form to complain about atrocities such as the government executing family members, the president committing genocide or the man downstairs buying a karaoke machine.

Asians prefer to gently massage ("censor") history. For example, Chairman Mao was responsible for more deaths



than Hitler but still has a massive fan base in China and South Asia. On a trip to Nepal, I said to a Mao fan: "What do you think about the fact that Mao killed 30 million?" The guy wagged his head di-

agonally and said: "Hey, we are all making the mistakes."

Strolling through Munich, my guide and I chanced upon famous Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, a cuddly fat man who

had assembled a 100-meter-long outdoor artwork made of brightly coloured schoolbags to remember children killed in the Sichuan earthquake.

My German host was entranced, saying: "You say that Asians are encouraged not to remember the sins of the past, but this artist has dramatically captured a dark event in Chinese history."

"Yes, he has," I replied. "But why do you think he's put it up in Europe? The last time he campaigned for earthquake victims in China he was beaten up by police."

Here's a quick lesson in how to write an Asian history book. Simply copy the text below and delete the bits you don't like.

"Before independence, our country was ruled by

(a) an evil feudal society
(b) a glorious free society.

But then the country was taken over by

(a) a band of heroic freedom fighters
(b) a ragtag guerrilla army after
(a) a bloodless coup

(b) a cruel massacre.

The people

(a) hailed their liberators

(b) suffered under their hated oppressors."

Meanwhile, the last chapter of almost every Asian history book is the same:

"Today, the rulers talk about freedom, democracy and pluralism but

(a) the people suffer one-party rule

(b) the people suffer one-party rule, or

(c) the people suffer one-party rule."

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Corrigendum

In the article "Why Bangladesh should win the arbitration" by Badrul Imam, printed on October 28, paragraph 12 says "Both India and Myanmar used equitable principle while..." whereas it should read "Both India and Myanmar used equidistance principle while..." The error is regretted.