

Reinventing non-profit orientation

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KAZI S.M. KHASRUL ALAM QUDDUSI

ADMITTEDLY, good governance is a natural precondition for foreign aid to the developing countries, and their developed counterparts are claimed to be laying utmost emphasis on it. Good governance is

their real value.

At the same time, de-bureaucratisation and small government have recently been high on agenda in the administrative reform ventures in almost every part of the globe. Thus, aid-seeking countries are, quite naturally, being considered to be

so much that radical rethinking as to their actual orientation is highly warranted.

Meanwhile, computer revolution and information technology have jolted the globe one way or the other. For public administration, however, the impact has been rather heavy. State machineries and activities will definitely experience a different kind of metamorphosis through wholesale automation resulting in gross deduction of manpower in the public sector. Needless to say, this technological blessing will act as an ideal catalyst in the already buoyant cutback management practices around the globe.

As the public sector is still the model and largest employer, not least in the developing countries, policy makers as well as administrators will have to make a point of devising something extraordinary if the bloated phantasm of unemployment is not to be blown up to the point of exploding. Both the policy makers and the executors, positioned in a vantage point, might find it better to sit back and pretend to live in an ivory tower, but the bitter consequences may, in all likelihood, jeopardise the social equilibrium in the long run.

Apparently, this particular problem might not seem to have a direct bearing on public administration, but the basic philosophy of public administration -- attainment of good life -- remains seriously threatened as a larger section of people including the lifeline of a country -- the youth -- will be on the receiving end of resultant joblessness.

Arguably, one of the seminal differences between public and private administration rests upon profit orientation. Public administration is predominantly non-profit and the latter is profit oriented. But, in public administration, non-profit orientation had been manipulated so much that rethinking as to this phenomenon became a dire necessity.

Managerialism in Great Britain paved the way for reinventing the non-profit orientation. Managerialism, among other things, introduced private sector techniques in the central administration with clear intentions of making the government efficient, effective and, above all, cost-effective.

By now, however, it is more than established that any private sector technique can be assimilated into the public sector or administration for the sake of cost effectiveness and better service towards the customer. As a matter of fact, infiltration of such practices into the public sector has been so penetrating that principles of public administration are said to be in danger of being eclipsed by entrepreneurial or private sector practices.

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Sharp descent for Padma awards

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M.J. AKBAR

MAULANA Azad has been much on my mind for a variety of melancholy reasons. The neglect of his memory is reflected in the loneliness of his shrine at Urdu Park, near Delhi's Jama Masjid. It is utterly appalling that we romanticise a pathetic weasel, Bahadur Shah Zafar, who lost an Indian Empire, and diminish the man who, along with a dozen others, sat at the apex of a party that destroyed the British Empire.

Singular conviction was the hallmark of his politics. While his great compatriots had the support of their communities, Azad stood bereft, but resolute and heroic, against a rising tide of venom. His political courage was complemented by intellectual depth: Sarojini Naidu once said Azad was 50 on the day he was born. Find him in two lines of verse he wrote at the age of 14: *Deh behkudi ke nashebofaraz dek Puchi zamin ki to kahi aasman ki.* (Azad, see how this restless spirit soars /The question is of the earth, the answer of the skies.)

He was our first education minister, a chair he filled till his death in 1958. Nehru wanted to honour this giant with a major Padma award. Azad laughed it off. How could a government give itself an award, he asked. Azad did not measure his worth with a political tape. There are still those who turn down awards because they do not want their independence besmirched by a gift from government.

You have to be naïve to believe that the awards process is free of government interference. The obedient will always be allotted their corner a little askance of the deserving.

You have to be either extremely insecure, or be possessed by a hypocrite's need for camouflage, to lobby and beg and wheedle for a Padma award.

It is perfectly all right if the award comes your way without your knowledge, which still happens half the time. The other half becomes an opportunity for racketeers who treat a Padma award as a certificate of exoneration after a lifetime of deceit and manipulation. This subverts the very purpose of the award.

The people have recognised the cynicism at the heart of the process, and therefore do not much care one way or the other. In any case, awards are a mutual-backscratching opera-

tion between the elite. No one is going to rush off to buy a ticket to a Saif Ali Khan movie because he has suddenly become a Padma Shri.

To be fair, Saif himself was a trifle puzzled at the sudden arrival of honour at his doorstep. He has been known to give the odd brilliant performance, and he dances almost as well as his girlfriend, but one doubts if he, or anyone else, thinks of him as a legend.

The most amusing story about awards was told to me by one of the finest human beings I have had the privilege to know, or know of, H.Y. Sharada Prasad. He was the most trusted member of Indira Gandhi's inner circle, a bureaucrat of the old school. Honesty was his outstanding virtue, but his principal asset was wisdom born of a marriage between learning and experience.

Sharada Prasad treated fortune and misfortune as equally deceptive imposters, passing the days of exile from power (after Mrs Gandhi's defeat in 1977) with as gentle a smile as he possessed when he sat in the holy of

holies, the Prime Minister's Office.

He was a friend of D. G. Tendulkar, whose nine-volume biography of Gandhi may be untidily written, but is one of the great classics of modern Indian history. It is lost today in some forgotten shelf of Publications Divisions, bought by libraries as part of a respectable list that no one reads. Tendulkar used to live very simply in tenement in Mumbai, with a beloved stray dog as his best companion.

Early every morning, the dog would wake up the author and the two would go for a walk along Marine Drive. On his return home, Tendulkar would catch up on the last of his sleep. One day, the dog came rushing back after Tendulkar had dozed off, and virtually dragged the author out of his bed and on to the street. Just as they reached open air, an earthquake destroyed the flimsy tenement. But this is not the relevant story, of course.

Tendulkar was given a Padma Bhushan when Dr. Rajendra Prasad was rashtrapati. His first reaction was to send a telegram to Rajendra Prasad saying that could he please be given a watch instead -- what he really needed was a watch, not a piece of paper from the Government of India. Let it be on record that Tendulkar got both the watch and the Padma.

From Tendulkar to oily businessmen is a sharp descent for the Republic.

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Finding the right direction.

epitomised by predictable, open, and enlightened policy-making, a bureaucracy imbued with professional ethos acting in furtherance of the public good, the rule of law, transparent processes, and a strong civil society participating in public affairs.

Emergence and growth of pressure groups is a very positive development in the contemporary world. Many of these groups can be called civil society groups in modern parlance. The role of these groups in a state's day-to-day affairs is becoming increasingly prominent. In fact, civil society groups are termed as bridges between the government and the people, and rightly so.

As the masses are not organised, these groups play a pivotal role in articulating people's demands. Anyway, such arrangements are supposed to have a very salutary effect on the languishing administrations of resource-scarce countries should the policy makers and the executing agencies or the bureaucracies succeed in grasping

the repositories of these apparent magic potions. Notably, administrative reform has always been a catchword in the domain of administration and governance and, currently, it seems to be enjoying its heyday.

Merit-based bureaucracy is, of course, a priceless gift of administrative reforms in many modern civil services. Technical expertise and command of information have traditionally provided the bureaucracy with a cutting edge over other machineries, though these attributes are not necessarily their monopoly in the present world.

Anyway, expertise, protective nature of their job, power of advising, discretion and power to organise clientele have tilted the balance of power towards the bureaucrats in a big measure. This unlimited bureaucratic power has affected and corrupted the mind-set of bureaucrats to a great extent. The arrogance and insensitivity of some bureaucrats, especially in developing countries, have increased

honest and conscientious personality. In recognition of his unblemished service record he was appointed the Director General of Anti-Corruption Bureau and later served as Chairman Bangladesh Textile Mills Corporation. He earned the rank and status of a secretary to the government.

I first came across late Shareef Ali in 1973 when he was Superintendent of Police greater Rangpur district and I was stationed in Natore as sub-divisional police officer. Those were less than stable times and as I was trying to find my feet I found his counsel and words of caution and encour-

agement very invigorating. This was significant because in the rough and tumble of law and order administration there were not many that would helpfully stare and care. His words lifted my spirits as I almost felt like a boy scout in hell. From a distance I watched how composed he was under adversity.

Not many amongst the post-liberation police officers know that there used to be a police aide-de-camp to the governor of East Pakistan. This was a prestigious posting for young PSP (Police Service of Pakistan) officers and the last Police ADC to



Meer Mahmud Shareef Ali

Governor Admiral Ahsan was Mr. Mahbubuddin Ahmed, Bir Bikrom, one of those brave hearts of our liberation struggle. Late Shareef Ali, graceful as he was, adorned this post of ADC. He would often narrate experiences of this posting in his characteristic manner laced with subtle wit.

Shareef Ali, in his distinguished career, served twice in the Police Academy, first as vice-principal and later as principal, assignments that were undoubtedly vital and desirable organisationally but often not preferred individually for reasons peculiar to our administrative environ-

ment. During those stints he endeared himself admirably to his probationers and many of them lovingly cherish the fond memories.

In Mr. Shareef Ali's demise we have lost a gentleman who was manifestly conscientious. During active service and also later he did not make demands on others and was content with a simple lifestyle. May Allah grant the forbearance and fortitude to Mrs. Shareef Ali and the very well-groomed children. May Shareef Ali's soul rest in eternal peace.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Remembering a gentleman officer

MUNAMMAD NURUL HUDA

WITH profound shock and a sense of loss I remember Meer Mahmud Shareef Ali who passed away on February 8th. For many of his friends, colleagues and acquaintances Shareef Ali was real *shareef*, evoking respect from peers and juniors alike. A very soft spoken person gifted with subtle wit, Shareef Ali was appointed to the Police Service of Pakistan in 1962 and served in different capacities very creditably.

In his public service career Shareef Ali distinguished himself as a very

4 reality shows we need to see



ARRIVING home from work, I found my daughter watching a TV show featuring an exhausted young person of indeterminate sex weeping on a stage as panellists made sophisticated, constructive comments such as:

"Whoa, that totally sucked."

"I thought American Idol was on last night?" I asked, having spent an hour the previous night trying to labour at the dinner table while that agonizing spectacle took place at full volume on the other side of the room, if apartments as small as mine can be said to have other sides.

American Idol, the world's most successful TV program, features Simon Cowell, a man who cannot sing, telling people who can sing, that they can't. The logic defeats me.

My daughter explained patiently this was "completely different," by

which I discovered that it was exactly the same thing, but with the public humiliation of dancers instead of singers.

The following night, a panel was roasting weeping contestants. It was a search for the next star designer.

The fourth night saw the same scenario once more. "This is a search for the world's best dog," my daughter told me. "You're joking," I replied. She wasn't.

I sneered at all this until a few days ago. That's when it was reported Cowell, the grumpy judge on several of these shows, had just signed a new deal for \$500 million (HK\$3.9 billion).

For some of us, that's a lot of money. Why, if I had that sort of cash, I could do all sorts of wild and reckless spending, like buying shoes for my children instead of tying rags around their feet.

The scales fell from my eyes. Talent contests were a great idea. I quickly consulted the smartest people on earth -- that's you, the readers -- to come up with a draft list of sure-fire hits.

1. The World's Next Top Celebrity Disaster. We all know that the personal life of Lindsay Lohan, also known as Britney Spears and Paris Hilton, is a mess. We need a new walking catastrophe. Can you party so hard that you

get in trouble with the police?

Front-runners: spoiled children of the elite in Hong Kong, India, China, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh -- and pretty much everywhere else, actually.

2. The World's Next Top Rogue Nation. North Korea has gone quiet, Iraq is beyond hope, and so is Afghanistan. The planet needs a new bad guy. All you have to do is pretend to be friendly with your neighbours while quietly making nuclear weapons to blow them to bits.

Front-runners: Pakistan and Iran.

3. The World's Next Top Fake Democracy. A panel of experts will judge leaders from countries, which

promise multiparty democracy in their constitutions, but feature a single group clinging endlessly to power, year after year.

Front-runners: Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia.

4. Asia's Next Top Sacked Columnist. A dim-witted journalist writes columns poking fun at the rich and famous, forgetting that he is in Asia, where it's really not wise to do that sort of thing.

Front-runner: oops.

For more on innovative reality shows, visit our columnist at www.vittachi.com