



Departments should work like the wheels of a clock.

Getting it together

Whatever might be the nature of the debate or discord, the reality is that there should be strong coordination of activities at the district level and there should be a focal point to coordinate interdepartmental issues, especially law and order, which is indispensable for achieving millennium development goals.

DHIRAJ KUMAR NATH

STRENGTHENING result-oriented performance at the district level and below is critical at present to ensure the effective implementation of development programs to achieve the goals of the sixth 5-year plan and 20-years perspective plan that the government is going to launch to turn Bangladesh into a middle-income country.

To translate these visionary ideas into actions and successful programs, coordinated efforts must be taken at the district level and law-and-order situation must be improved. Deputy commissioners can effectively coordinate this provided they are given the opportunity. This was the main theme of the three-day conference which ended on July 27.

A deputy commissioner -- by virtue of his position and power vested under the law of the land -- is the district magistrate and also the district collector, acting as the custodian of lands and properties on behalf of the government. He is the governance keystone at the field level and acts as the administrative focal point.

His primary responsibilities are land administration, local governance, development activities, revenue administration, disaster management, food security and safety, public welfare, elections, treasury functions and, above all, law and order.

As the district's head of criminal adminis-

tration, police support is indispensable for the deputy commissioner to enforce his authority and maintain law and order as prerequisites for development.

Besides, departments like agriculture, food, power, transport and communication, irrigation, health, customs, income tax, fisheries, livestock, cooperatives, etc discharge their own responsibilities according to their parent department's approved programs. Most of their functions are public-related and cannot be performed without support from elected representatives and civil administration.

Thus, at almost every step, these cadre officials need the support of the district administration, from land acquisition to settlement, for successful implementation of their projects. The deputy commissioner acts as crisis manager for all other departments actively involved in implementing development projects, public-related programs and welfare activities. With this scenario and background, the three-day conference of the DCs ended with around 200 proposals placed on board.

Therefore, on July 26, President Zillur Rahman urged deputy commissioners to contribute significantly and properly to implement government plans to turn Bangladesh into a middle-income country within 2010.

He very correctly directed them to consider development programs more important than

VIP protocol and the holding of seminars and symposiums in accelerating the country's pace of socioeconomic progress.

The president also emphasised that DCs should play a major role in creating a peaceful environment of cooperation to enable others and the general public to participate in development activities.

Coordination at the district level administration is imperative to ensure development activities and maintain law and order. The deputy commissioner's prime responsibility is to ensure cooperation among different departments, non-government organisations, private sector functionaries and development partners associated with monitoring and supervision of the projects. Even interdepartmental coordination is necessary at the field level, in which the deputy commissioner usually acts as facilitator.

The deputy commissioner's coordinating role is historical and tested over time. In fact, cooperation between a DC and an SP was always so intensive that both used to undertake field visits jointly for the sake of effective law and order administration. Improved law and order in any district is a sign of good governance, when the public acclaim the government with a clear and loud voice.

In the recent past, due to many unresolved pending issues with unclear directives, there was some evidence of non-cooperation between general administration and the police. Besides, pending under-trial cases or sensitive police cases are under the jurisdiction of the chief judicial magistrates, and a DC has little information though he is the chairman of the district law and order committee.

Thus, the law and order committee cannot resolve many pending cases or take a decision on them, and executive magistrates working with deputy commissioners sometimes cannot provide adequate information

because judicial magistrates take cognisance of offences like robbery, burglary, drug trafficking, murder or detecting terrorists.

Executive magistrates exercise their power under Cr. PC 144 and take preventive actions wherever the situation so demands. The gap in understanding widens when sometimes an SP does not attend a law and order committee meeting headed by a deputy commissioner.

Such a situation needs to be addressed urgently to make field administration more efficient and effective, and for executing development projects perfectly and properly. District administration is the key to the public service system to win the public's trust and confidence.

Innumerable problems have emerged recently, besetting the district administration, and creating confusion about jurisdictions, charter of duties and responsibilities and allocation of business. This might be why the head of police administration expressed his resentment in public. The adviser in charge of administration also had to take the floor to clarify the situation.

Whatever might be the nature of the debate or discord, the reality is that there should be strong coordination of activities at the district level and there should be a focal point to coordinate interdepartmental issues, especially law and order, which is indispensable for achieving millennium development goals.

It is high time for the government to constitute a commission to identify the issues that developed due to separation of the judiciary and other activities generated due to massive development works assigned at the district level. It is also high time to discuss drafting of the civil service act publicly to make it more acceptable to all cadres and the public, since the bureaucracy's image is decreasing daily due to both known and unknown reasons.

Dhiraj Kumar Nath is former Adviser to the Caretaker Government.

And life goes on

Z.A. KHAN

THE early hours of July 27 saw the end of a man who lived in the hearts of tens of millions of the deprived and down-trodden for over four decades. The inert mortal remains of late Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan was lying barely attended in the cold mortuary of Square Hospital, his penultimate destination before his final journey, shocked me profoundly.

A barrage-breaking flow of tears rolled down my face when I heard about his passing away, and I silently prayed for *magferat* of the finest and most magnificent person who had led a saintly life and was regarded as a rare personality who combined in his person the sterling qualities that makes one a sage.

Three weeks ago, when he was flown back to Dhaka from Singapore, we almost knew that the inevitable was lurking around the corner. People of all hues came to wish him well and expressed their hope that he would not desert us any time soon as he was needed to side with those that did not have a committed guardian.

When his well-wishers in great numbers thronged around him, I got submerged in the recollections of his activities, affection and antecedents.

The ever active and most obliging leader that late Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan was, he went hard on those who played truant with the people that needed support of their leaders. He was a valiant freedom fighter who braved all kinds of odds, and organised a band of freedom fighters who remained in their dear motherland and never surrendered to the Pakistani armed forces.

A soft-spoken and quiet politician, late Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan was a tenacious, tolerant and logical leader who was chosen to act as an arbiter to settle any political impasses that could lead to chaos or even political deadlock.

Gracious in behaviour and suave in disposition, he was a blend of orthodox tradition and dynamic modernism. I used to wonder how he could bind the two in a happy wedlock, which was clothed in an endless talent for the unexpected. His calm and tranquil personality captivated all those around him, which is a rare example of excellence and exclusivity.

When we used to request him to teach us the way to tackle all sorts of problems he would tell us that a good teacher hardly explained his vision and method of accomplishment, and asked us to simply stand beside him and see for ourselves. Although he was slender in body he was tough in mind, and never hesitated to scorn the castaways and reward the righteous. I hardly saw him exploding unnecessarily. He displayed calm courage during tumults, and admitted with humility if he thought he had faltered.

He has been dead for a few days, and is in deep slumber in the courtyard of his village home where he was born 67 years ago. He lies in the shadows of trees that pour leaves on his grave when the wind blows, as if to garland it as the new entrant in her breast. He now remains immovable in his final home, to sleep till eternity.

While passing his grave I wept a little, but no one saw it. Then I consoled myself by remembering John Donne's famous couplet "for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee." I left Masimpur under Shibpur upazila in deep remorse, thinking that perhaps this is the way life goes on.

Z.A. Khan is a former Director General of BISS.



STAR ARCHIVE

Deaths most unacceptable

What, however, is unpardonable in Bangladesh is that people are being actually murdered on the roads by drivers who can get away without any punishment whatsoever. The existing law protects these killer-drivers, who cannot be charged with manslaughter if they cause death to any number of people in a road accident.

GOLAM SARWAR CHOWDHURY

TWO senior civil servants were killed in a road accident yesterday, reminding us once again of our collective helplessness in front of some criminal drivers who have no respect for life. The regularity of road traffic accidents has become so alarming that common citizens of the country leave it to providence while travelling within the country.

The two civil servants, including a female secretary, died in a most horrendous manner, reaffirming our fear that

even powerful and privileged people are not safe while travelling. A few weeks ago, the mayor of Chittagong had a lucky escape when his sports utility vehicle (SUV) was badly damaged, and he narrowly escaped death.

Even though I don't have the statistics with me, I am pretty much sure that Bangladesh must be on top of the list of countries where people get killed in road accidents. This scenario has darkened over the last few years because of the increased number of vehicles plying on the roads, particularly those that connect the capital with other cities and

towns in the country. The roads to Chittagong and Mymensingh are often described as deathtraps. One could call the highways "driveways to certain death."

The two-lane Dhaka-Chittagong road -- I refuse to call it a highway by any standard -- is perhaps one of the most dangerous roads on this planet. If you are travelling in a light vehicle, SUV included, you can't be sure that you will step out of your car alive after reaching your destination.

Oncoming buses and trucks of different sizes, some of which are jalopies and not road-worthy in any way, are notorious for their attempts to overtake vehicles in front and, in the process, ending up in head-on collisions.

Even if you are driving very carefully and abiding by all the traffic rules, there is no guarantee as such that you will be spared by the killer vehicles whose drivers just don't have the common sense to manage a motorised vehicle.

Many years ago in the US, I once took a defensive driving course lasting the whole day. I still remember the first few words of the instructor, who said that a vehicle was something that made your life easy and convenient. However, if it was in the wrong hands, it could immediately turn into a death-machine.

Many of the truck and bus drivers in Bangladesh are merely maniacs, who lack even the common sense of crossing a road carefully let alone have the skill of operating a large motorised vehicle. Some of them may even be mentally retarded, although getting a driving license is as easy for them as buying a bus ticket from a counter.

The shameful multi-million taka turnover at the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) offices in Dhaka and other parts of the country is now an industry; an organisation from where even the visually handicapped can get driving licenses by paying the right amount of money. If one can't pay enough to get a proper license, of course

without any tests, there is an option to get a fake license just by paying only a nominal amount.

With a driving license of any kind the driver can operate a vehicle without any fear. A section of corrupt policemen, make sure that the fake licenses cause no problem to their owners. In Dhaka city itself, these criminally corrupt policemen are seen pulling over trucks and buses to check if the booty is being paid regularly.

Accidents on the road can never be stopped totally. They are likely to happen even in countries that boast of the best highway systems in the world. A few weeks ago, three Bangladeshi citizens died instantly in a freak accident in Saskatoon, Canada. In most developed countries, apart from such accidents, hundreds get killed during social occasions because of drunk-driving and over-speeding.

What, however, is unpardonable in Bangladesh is that people are being

actually murdered on the roads by drivers who can get away without any punishment whatsoever. The existing law protects these killer-drivers, who cannot be charged with manslaughter if they cause death to any number of people in a road accident. The first step that has to be immediately taken is to legislate laws that hand out exemplary punishment to drivers who kill people while driving.

The next step, which must also come immediately, is to transform the money-minting BRTA into a public service providing organisation. If required, the work of the BRTA could be handed over to a private organisation for the sake of transparency and, more importantly, because we can't really let thousands of people die every year simply because of the greed of immoral officials. To these people, money matters much more than unfortunate deaths on the road.

Golam Sarwar Chowdhury is Professor of English, University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh (ULAB).