

Political stability and democracy

Today is the 125th birth anniversary of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy. In remembering the man, we reprint an article written by him when he was the prime minister of Pakistan as a leader from Awami League in the coalition government. In this piece, we get a glimpse of the vision of this leader from Bengal on democracy, rule of law, good governance, and especially the relationship between the elected government and the electorate—issues which we think are relevant for South Asia today. The following is an abridged version of the article published in the April 1957 issue of Foreign Affairs.

HUSEYN SHAHEED SUHRAWARDY

IN addressing an interpretation of this kind to a foreign audience, a prime minister comes under a double temptation—to boast and yet to be apologetic for the state of affairs in his nation. I hope to resist these temptations; it is better for us to be understood by our friends, and by ourselves, as we are, without exaggeration of virtues or indulgence of faults.

We in Pakistan sometimes show a tendency—and I know we have by no means a monopoly of it—to commend ourselves merely for the abstract goodness of our asserted purposes, without regard to whether our purposes have been fulfilled. So simple an action as the decision of a year ago to insert in the official title of our Republic an adjective descriptive of the prevailing faith has been made an occasion for exultation among us as if it were of itself a proof of courage and moral excellence. One often hears and reads assertions of our superiority in ideology, as if that counted in place of performance. On the other hand one sometimes hears it said in extenuation of deficiencies in our real political life that, after all, Pakistan as a state is not yet even ten years old. On hearing this excuse I usually point out that the circumstances of world politics permit no people to claim such exemptions from responsibility as might be appropriate to a child. A nation can earn the respect due to maturity by itself acting maturely. I reject any excuse based upon our youngness as a polity. Discovery and confession are first steps in the correction of faults. By mature and honest self-appraisal in place of self-praise we can best progress in earning the esteem we covet.

To set our problems in perspective, it is well to begin with some of the characteristics of the past from which Pakistan emerged as a state.

For many centuries before partition and independence in 1947 the type of government experienced by the peoples of the subcontinent of Asia was imposed by right of conquest; it lacked the ingredient of consent. In such a situation administration and popular aspiration turn on each other as counter forces. Those governing almost inevitably regard their power as something to be exercised despite the will of the governed. The governed regard government as something set against their own interests and purposes. In this situation government has authority only in a narrow sense of being able to compel compliance but not in the deeper moral meaning of having the faculty to elicit consent, to lead and to bind in conscience. In such a situation, law exists in the sense in which we speak of laying down the law—a morally neutral meaning applicable to what administrators ordain and magistrates effect in the manifold daily undertakings of the state; but it does not exist in the sense in which we speak of the rule of law—a phrase invoking a concept of administrators amenable to a set of purposes and restrained by limits established by the consent and will of those subject to their authority.

When law in the technical sense of what is enforced is divorced from law in its moral sense implicit in the rule of law, the operators of the mechanism of government tend inevitably to think of themselves as in possession and to regard scornfully and fearfully as trespassers those who attempt to call up and to marshal

popular political aspirations. By the same token, those approaching politics simply in terms of kindling popular aspiration tend to miss a disciplined consciousness of the limits of government. They think of it more as an exercise in rhetoric, theory and ideals than as a stern business of keeping promises.

A people coming into independence from a colonial past faces a task of correcting this alienation between the two. The operative and the evocative aspects of the state must be brought into working relationship. New habits of mind have to be substituted for old. Administration must unlearn its scorn of politics. Politics must overcome its hostility to administration. Only in this way can a government and the people governed communicate confidence to each other and learn that they can count on each other. On such a basis those in authority can draw on

habits of a departed past, have permitted moral independence to lag behind legal independence, and have kept political leadership and governmental responsibility as things opposed to each other rather than bringing them into synthesis.

In giving a diagnosis I have indicated a remedy. Fortunately this remedy lies completely within our resources without necessity of any aid from abroad. We Pakistanis have no choice as to how to go about creating an effective basis for our state. No royal or aristocratic pattern of duty and authority based on long and universal acceptance is at hand to serve our needs. The goal can be achieved only through elections. Warning voices sometimes tell me that Pakistan is not ready for the democratic process. I can only reply that then Pakistan is not ready at all; for there is no alternative way of bringing about rapport between authority and people, no other

political life, and the centrifugal influence of provincialism.

I do not deny the existence of these ills. My answer is simply that the purported remedy represents not a cure but avoidance of a cure. We have only to look to the lands that have dictatorship to gain some insight into how it would work. Dictatorship would not combat corruption; it would erect corruption into a principle. Dictatorship would not widen the access to talent in the public service; it would close sources of talent by pre-empting office for a chosen inner group and alienating the rest. Instead of durable identity between government and people derived from the operation of consent, dictatorship could employ only the brittle bonds of coercion. Its instrument would not be information but deception and concealment, and it would seek not the education but the confusion and the

unthinkingly by those who fail to realise that politics is essential for the cohesion of the state and that the politicians are its servitors. Politics is the grand avenue of service to humanity... " I pledged that there would be no loss of time in making preparations for a general election, and I added: "I think I can lay claim to at least this much of trust, that the election will be fair and free, so long as I have anything to do with it."

I wish it were possible to hold general elections forthwith. It is not. The technical work necessary in preparation will take some months. With good fortune and unabating effort we can have the basis laid for general elections possibly a year from now.

Those who find the prospect of democracy in Pakistan too chancy and fearsome point especially to the factors of political apathy, the meagreness of economic life and the prevalence of illiteracy among large portions of our population. They are apprehensive that the people will vote emotions and unfulfillable wants rather than bringing their politics down—or should I say up?—to the level of rational choice among practical alternatives.

I do not share these apprehensions. I am thoroughly familiar with the political consciousness of the people of East Pakistan. I should be the last to deny their aptitude for seasoning the meat of politics with the spice of enthusiasm. Yet I have seen them many times gather by tens of thousands to give rapt attention to a realistic discussion of policy. A more politically conscious people does not exist anywhere.

The potential for a similar political consciousness exists in the western province. In September of 1956, soon after becoming Prime Minister, I spent ten heartening days in travel through the northern part of West Pakistan. I spoke time after time to audiences of tribesmen in from the sparse hills, to farmers of the rich valleys, to urban throngs of artisans and tradesmen. I heard their questions. These questions preponderantly did not reflect dreams of utopia and did not spring from communal animosity. They were mostly about the real substance of politics—prices for crops, allocation of resources, the need for better housing and the like. Repeatedly I called on the police to remove the barriers set up presumably to protect me from my listeners. Each time I called on the throngs to move forward to the very edge of the dais so that I might see their faces and they might see mine, because, as I said, the people and the Government must henceforth stand face to face. Then I undertook to explain the identity between people and government and the obligation now imposed on them, as well as upon magistrates and administrators, to learn that the government is not master but servant. I explained to them also—and with emphasis—the need for government to have authority so as to be able to bring expertness to bear in its decisions and to weigh the general interest without being subjected to the pressures, passions and prejudices rife in the marketplace. In the faces before me I saw comprehension and concurrence. I was fortified in my assurance that popular confidence and rational consent are not beyond expectation but are indeed the great unexploited resource still available to strengthen the nation.



US President Dwight D Eisenhower (L) and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (R) with then Prime Minister of Pakistan Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, White House, July 1957.

popular confidence and public will as sources of power for getting things done. Without it, they feel insecure; their primary concern is anxiety about holding on. In this situation public confidence and will become negative factors, restricting rather than adding to the capability of authority for achieving the general good.

Estrangement between the governing and the governed; anxiety on the part of those in authority over their warrant and their tenure; sterility of government resulting from a lack of confidence among those in authority as to their ability to tap the creative forces of public trust; vanity, opportunism and emotional extravagance characterising mass leaders who have never tasted responsibility; cold feet and hot heads—such are the conditions of instability in government. These have persisted among us in Pakistan in the degree that we have failed to resolve our wills to throw off

avenue to national fulfilment.

I have sometimes heard arguments for an opposite course to national consolidation, a course involving abandonment of the idea of franchise, discarding of principles of accountability and resorting to authority based not upon a warrant to rule but upon the power to rule—in brief, dictatorship. Advocates of this course are in a small and diminishing minority. Nevertheless, the argument for it should be answered if for no other reason than to demonstrate the good sense of the course we have chosen instead.

Whenever I ask an advocate of this expedient to give a bill of particular ills of our political society requiring remedy, I get some such list as this: corruption, shortage of talent in government, insufficiency of bonds of identity between authority and people, deficiency of public education and information, the dominance of emotion rather than reason in

continued tutelage of the people by playing on their emotions rather than permitting the operation of reason. As for the difficult problem of balance of interest and power between our two provinces, dictatorship could succeed not in producing concord but only in subjugating one to dominance by the other.

In any event, whatever our weaknesses of the past, they certainly have not been attributable to overdoses of democracy, for we have yet to try a full dosage. Upon being called to the Prime Ministership I made clear my own outlook in these words, which I now reaffirm: "The first essential is to secure political stability, and that can never be attained unless we allow free play to democratic processes. ... I realise that democracy has its weaknesses, for democracy is human; it has its inevitable failings, but on the whole it is the only sure road to progress and evolution. ... Politics and politicians too have been maligned

The way forward as floodwater recedes



WITH the widespread media attention being given to Hurricanes Harvey and Irma in the United States, it might seem

sheltering more than 106,000 people. As reported by Bangladesh's Humanitarian Coordination Task Team (HCTT), reaching the most affected areas in the northwest remains a challenge as roads are either severely damaged or submerged under floodwater. It is estimated that around 9,000 km of roads and 500 bridges and culverts have been damaged in the flood.

The government has allocated USD 1.1 million, 26,726 metric tonnes of rice and 65,260 packets of dry food to the flood-affected districts. It has also allocated 31,980 bundles of Corrugated Iron (CI) sheeting and USD 1.2 million for house reconstruction.

A number of local and international NGOs have come forward to address the plight of the flood-affected people in a region which is already strained by high concentrations of poverty.

Most emergency response programmes are currently providing cash assistance as the flood has wreaked havoc on livelihoods of the people, diminishing their income opportunities. The cash assistance is expected to enable the most vulnerable households among the flood-affected population to meet their immediate basic needs covering food, house repairing, health, livelihood inputs, transports and other non-food items.

Some NGOs are distributing family hygiene kits to the affected households. Mobile Information Desks have been established in some areas to provide information on health, hygiene, waterborne diseases and locally available government and non-government services for the flood-affected people.

As the flood situation is now showing some signs of improvement, the next challenge for the people is to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. According to government estimates, so far a total of 61,877 hectares of cropland, mostly growing rice, have been "completely damaged," while 531 million hectares have been "partially damaged."

What's needed is a massive early recovery effort to rebuild the livelihoods of the affected people. Roads and embankments need to be rebuilt preferably through "Cash for Work" programmes, which will help give the people access to much-needed cash. More than 480 community clinics have been damaged; these need to be brought back into service. As the floodwater recedes, we also need to ensure prevention of post-flood outbreaks of communicable diseases, immunisation, and continuation of primary health care services.

At least 4,000 educational

institutions in the country's northern and north-eastern districts have been affected by the flood. An immediate repairing intervention is required to allow students and teachers to return to schools. As always, a close coordination and collaboration between government agencies and non-government organisations will be instrumental in the early recovery efforts and to assist the affected people to regain their livelihoods, access to health care and education services.

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QUOTABLE Quote



MIKHAIL BULGAKOV

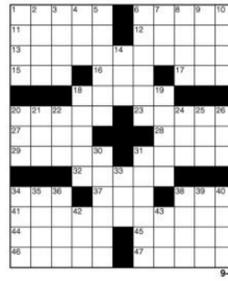
The Master and Margarita Russian writer, physician and playwright active in the first half of the 20th century

There is no greater misfortune in the world than the loss of reason.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Diamond corners
 - 6 Gang territories
 - 11 Houston player
 - 12 Acrobatic
 - 13 Place to learn manners
 - 15 Lock opener
 - 16 Flying mammal
 - 17—Aviv
 - 18 Bona fide
 - 20 Well fill
 - 23 Cuisine with
 - 27 Way to go
 - 28 Extra amount
 - 29 Prepare to drive
 - 31 Wasn't thrifty
 - 32 Fence supports
 - 34 Subside
 - 37 Overly

- DOWN**
- 1 Browser button
 - 2 Arthur of tennis
 - 3 Remain
 - 4 Make mistakes
 - 5 Grave
 - 6 Bit of strategy
 - 7 "That's gross!"
 - 8 Mob action
 - 9 Ice chunk
 - 10 Vend
 - 14 Slump
 - 18 Stop, as rain
 - 19 Packs down
 - 20 Soaked
 - 21 Logger's tool
 - 22 Bind up
 - 24 Coffee, in slang
 - 25 Coffee dispenser
 - 26 Volleyball need
 - 30 Bleaching chemical
 - 31 Some investments
 - 33 Urgent call
 - 34 Border
 - 35 Small nail
 - 36 Island east of Java
 - 38 Tender
 - 39 Ode or ballade
 - 40 Woeful cry
 - 42 Yoga need
 - 43 Fiery



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY



by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES



by Kirkman & Scott

