

Monthly Update
Local Governance

**LG Cluster, UNDP,
Dhaka Bangladesh**

December, 2007

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Review Meeting on AWP of 2008 for LIC



A review meeting to decide on the draft of Annual Work Plan (AWP) was held at the Local Government Division on 4th December, 2007. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Safar Raj Hossain, Secretary, LGD. Along with the members of Local Governance cluster of UNDP, the review meeting was attended by the Country Director of UNDP Manoj Basnyat, Roger Shotton, Regional Advisor of UNCDF from Bangkok; NPD of LGSP-LIC Mr. Muhammad Abul Quasem and representatives from World Bank, EC, Danida and GOB. Informative presentations provided everyone with a clear vision set for the annual work plan of 2008 for LIC. The

participants took part in a very lively discussion and pointed out many important outputs for LIC. They all agreed to approve the draft annual work plan of LIC for 2008.

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Annual Work Plan Meeting for LGSP-LIC.



A day long planning meeting to prepare the Annual Work Plan (AWP) for LGSP-Learning and Innovation Component organized by UNDP and UNCDF took place at Lake Shore Hotel, Gulshan, Dhaka on 5th December, 2007. Other than the members of Local Governance cluster of UNDP, it was attended by representatives of World Bank, EC and DANIDA and GOB as well as staff members from SLDGP. The meeting

was chaired by NPD of LGSP-LIC, Mr. Muhammad Abul Quasem and enlightened presentation of Roger Shotton, UNCDF Regional Technical Advisor from Bangkok provided everyone a clear vision for future plans. The participants worked together and prepared the draft detailed annual work plan of the project for 2008 identifying activities and sub-activities of each output and determined approximate budgets for each as well.

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Local Government

Effective empowerment of women on the cards

Effective participation of as many as 50,000 women representatives in various local government units will be ensured once a recommendation made by the committee on local government is implemented.

The committee submitted the recommendation to the chief advisor of the caretaker government recently. According to the report, the recommendation to reserve forty percent of all seats at all tiers of local government exclusively for women, will ensure their political empowerment at grassroots level administration.

The recommendation once implemented, will repeal the current system for reserved seats. Women will be directly elected to the reserved seats on adult franchise. Those elected in the reserved seats in the local government units will have full jurisdiction over all activities in their areas. In addition, women can also contest for any other seats in the polls.

At present there are around 14,500 women representatives elected to reserved seats in over 4,000 union parishads across the country in city corporations, municipalities and union parishads. But these representatives are not given specific jurisdictions to work on. Only 141 women, elected in general seats, at present are serving as members of the union parishads and have full jurisdiction to work on. The recommendations will even out these problems.

Under current laws, a women reserved seat is constituted for every three general seats [wards] of a local government unit. For instance Dhaka City Corporation has 30 reserved seats for women against the 90 general wards. This leads to 120 members being elected against 90 wards, and as such the 30 women elected to reserved seats lose out on effective roles to play within these wards.

The scenario will however be significantly different once the new recommendations come into place. According to it 40 percent all total seats will be reserved for women, enabling a more effective role for them in the wards they are elected in. This will increase the proportion of women's empowerment politically. For instance, at present a union parishad has 3 reserved seats, [wards] for women against every 9 general seats. The committee has recommended increasing the number of wards at each union to 15 from the existing 9. Six out of these 15 wards will be kept reserved for women. This will increase the ratio of women's seat against general members, and thus women's active participation.

Also at every election the EC will recommend a different area, by rotation, for the reserved seats to be selected from. This will ensure that by rotation women will be elected from all the different areas within a unit.

The committee for local government also recommends that the quota for 40 percent reserved seats for women at all tiers of the local government be held for three consecutive elections or next 15 years. Effectively 40 percent seats will be kept reserved in all elections in two consecutive elections. After this the government will consult the Election Commission to decide whether or not to keep the same quota for the next elections, or to bring down the percentage for reserved seats for women to 20 percent.

The committee has assessed that once its recommendations on restructuring the local government units are implemented, over 1.29 lakh representatives will be elected in the local government bodies, including chiefs of the bodies. Not counting the number of the chief posts to various local government units, there will be around 50,000 member posts reserved only for women.

The committee on local governments also submitted a set of proposed laws to replace the existing ones on different local government units. The drafted provisions in these laws recommend that each elected local government unit include a woman elected from the women's reserved seat to the 'three members panel', one of whom acts in absence of the chief of the body.

Under the proposed laws 40 percent of the chief posts to standing committees, which will be formed at each local government unit after election, will be given to women representatives elected to reserved seats.

In defence of the recommendations, to keep 40 percent seats reserved for women, the committee said the Article 28 of the Constitution says women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and of public life and nothing in the article shall prevent the state from making special provisions in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens.

On the other hand, the Election Commission (EC) has announced a proposal asking all the political parties to include 33 percent female participation in their all committees from central to grassroots level for women's political empowerment.

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Stripping MPs of local government role proposed

The committee on strengthening the local government bodies had submitted its report to the government on 13 December, recommending a three-tier local government system and stripping lawmakers of their role in local government.

In its four-volume report, the seven-member committee led by former secretary AMM Shawkat Ali suggests reserving 40 per cent seats for women at every tier — zila, upazila, and union — for three consecutive terms, said a committee member.

The committee also recommends setting up a local government commission to monitor and evaluate the overall activities of the local government bodies. At present, the local government, rural development and co-operatives ministry is the regulatory authority of the local government institutions. Lawmakers will have no role in any local government body and will not be eligible to contest any local government election, the committee recommends.

The interim government will soon form an inter-ministerial committee to examine the recommendations of the committee and determine the course of action for implementing them. 'Another committee will be formed at an inter-ministerial meeting to be held soon to examine the recommendations and deciding an implementation plan,' the LGRD and co-operatives adviser, Anwarul Iqbal, told New Age at his office. He said his ministry would take all possible initiatives to translate the recommendations into reality. 'But implementation of the recommendations for strengthening the local government system will require the involvement of a number of ministries.' The World Bank has already expressed its willingness to provide financial support for the government initiatives to strengthen the local governments, the adviser mentioned. He said the government would amend the Upazila Parishad Act, deleting the provision of making the local Member of Parliament an adviser to the local government body.

The committee on strengthening the local government bodies also recommends dissolving the Gram Sarker system introduced at the village level by the BNP-led alliance government. It suggests forming zila and upazila parishads through holding polls that are long overdue for making the local government bodies effective as well for ensuring good governance at grassroots level. The committee in its report has outlined the qualifications and disqualifications of an individual for contesting the elections to the local government bodies, besides redefining their jurisdictions and functions.

The committee proposes putting a ceiling on election expenses for the office of UP chairman at Tk one lakh and for member at Tk 20,000, for upazila parishad chairman at Tk three lakh, for zila parishad chairman at Tk 50,000, and for paursava chairman from Tk one lakh to Tk two lakh depending on the category of the municipality. The ceiling on election expenses for Dhaka City Corporation mayor has been proposed at Tk five lakh and for councillor [commissioner] at Tk one lakh, for Chittagong City Corporation mayor at Tk three lakh and for councillor at Tk 75,000, for mayor of other city corporations at Tk two lakh and for councillor at Tk 50,000.

The government should make the wealth statements of the elected representatives public through gazette notifications before they assume office at any level of the local government system, says the report.

The LGRD adviser said the government would suggest the Election Commission for holding the upazila parishad polls and the general elections on the same day for the sake of convenience.

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Activate Union Parishad to effectively face the disaster

Badiul Alam Majumdar

Global Vice-President and Country Director, The Hunger Project, Bangladesh, and Secretary, Shujan.

I have just returned from the cyclone Sidr affected areas. Along with a group of volunteers, I went to Borguna, Patuakhali, Pirojpur and Jhalakathi with some emergency relief supplies and much heartfelt empathy. There, I saw the devastation, which turned some areas into killing fields and shattered the lives and livelihood of so many.

A week after that fateful night of November 15, the smell of death lingers in the air as some of the dead still remained unburied, the wails of orphaned children are ever present, and the cries of widowed women pierce the darkness of the night. There is so much pain there that one's mind goes numb, and it becomes impossible to hold back the tears.

The number of deaths and injuries cannot accurately portray the devastation. Properties, houses, plants and crops -- almost all the worldly possessions of the residents -- were destroyed. Food from their homes, fish from their freshwater ponds, cows, buffalos, goats, ducks and chicken were all wiped away by the tidal surge.

Fishermen lost their nets and boats. Where there was no high tide, the water, contaminated by fallen leaves and other debris, has become unusable and pond fish are dying. The environment of the affected areas is totally polluted. The victims are hungry and thirsty. Many are living under the open sky. They do not even have seeds to plant.

This scenario is common to almost all districts of the south. Conditions in the chars and near riverbanks are, however, most serious. Falishatoli village under Monsha Baliatoli union of Borguna Sadar is a case in point.

Almost no dwelling is standing there. Even the soil from the foundations has washed away. The top of the embankment protecting the village is gone; creating deep ditches every few meters. Twenty-two people from this location were reportedly lost, nine people being from a single homestead. A "war" appears to have been fought here, as very few things have remained standing.

Each story I heard in the Sidr affected areas was more horrifying than the one before. I heard of a 10-year old schoolboy whose dead body was washed into a house. His school backpack was still tightly strapped to his back. Clearly, he tried to flee from death carrying his most important possession!

I heard of a young man dying under a fallen wall while trying to rescue his blind, aging mother. Instead of swimming away to save her own life, a mother embraced death holding her child to her bosom.

In Falishatoli, I heard of a mason who came home from his workplace in Dhaka to find that all four of his family members were dead. He was last seen leaving the area wailing - - "who should I live for anymore?"

This is not the first time that a natural disaster has hit coastal Bangladesh. They have occurred many times before. The great tidal wave of 1970 killed over half a million people. The loss of life and property in the 1991 cyclone was also enormous.

In addition, there have been many relatively smaller calamities. Even though the destruction from these smaller calamities was less, their cumulative impact is serious and far-reaching.

Because of repeated disasters in the past, many people were already in an awful state before Sidr arrived. Malnutrition, especially among the poorest segment of the society like women and the disadvantaged, is nakedly visible here.

The women of these areas are short and very thin. The effects of women's malnutrition are clearly noticeable among the children. Because of malnutrition, their immune systems have not developed fully.

Given an outbreak of common diseases like diarrhea and pneumonia, they will, therefore, be the first victims. Even though malnutrition and lack of immunity are the real killers -- diarrhea and pneumonia are easily blamed for the deaths.

Clearly, the lives of the people of Sidr affected areas are once again shattered, but they are not defeated. In the past, these people, who lost their loved ones and much of their material possessions, have courageously fought back. They appear to be determined to do so again this time. Resiliency is a unique trait of the Bangladeshis, especially among the disaster prone people of this country.

Another distinguishing attribute of these people is that they have few worldly possessions and their demands are also very limited. Given rock-bottom minimums, they are satisfied. If they are able feed and clothe themselves and have roofs over their heads, they feel "grateful."

They do not need fancy cars or extravagant palaces. Still, our policymakers have repeatedly shown indifference toward these citizens in the past. Our leaders have even ignored their survival needs during disasters. Thus, we don't even have enough cyclone shelters for the coastal areas. Only 2000 such shelters with stated capacity to hold 20 lac exist, although the population of the coastal region is several times more.

What was most visible to me in the Sidr affected areas is the lack of coordination. Many individuals, organisations, and the government are distributing emergency relief. They are doing it based on their own instincts and cursory information. As a result, even a week after the disaster hit, help has not yet reached some remote areas where the communication system has broken down.

In some locations, especially close to the riverbanks, relief supplies have been distributed repeatedly. Consequently, the right kinds of supplies are not reaching the right places. This is unacceptable in a country like Bangladesh, which has vast disaster management experience. In any event, the government will have to take responsibility for the coordination, and we are pleased that it has taken the initiative under an honourable adviser.

A prerequisite for coordination is reliable information. The number of dead and injured, where they are, what types of damage occurred in which location, and what type of help is urgently needed in different areas -- such information needs to be collected for each village. For example, information about whose dwellings were demolished, which families are hungry, who lost how many bulls and buffalos, how many hand pumps are dysfunctional, which public institutions such as schools were destroyed, etc., needs to be collected.

With an appropriate format developed for this purpose, the local Union Parishad representatives could easily gather this information in a few days.

It would only require the initiative of the UNOs. The help of the armed forces would be needed for reaching the remote areas. District and upazila level officers, instead of performing protocol duties, could be assigned to specific unions to help with data collection and need assessments. We feel that such information and groundwork are still needed.

The information offices at the upazila could be turned into information centres, where which type of help is needed in which areas could be displayed. The information displayed at these centres could come from Union Parishads, journalists and social workers, and could be used by all concerned to direct assistance to appropriate places. The adviser's office, to be located in Barisal, could do the much-needed supervision and monitoring through the DCs and other functionaries.

Union parishads will have to play the most vital role in the process of coordination. UPs must also be used for distributing help. We do not understand why this important institution with rich traditions, which has withstood the test of time, is not used to tackle this dire emergency.

Also, if the elected UP representatives cannot effectively respond to this call of humanity with honesty and dedication, there is no justification in keeping this 135-year old institution. Unlike in the past, there are no parallel networks of "MP sarkar" to bypass them or make them ineffective.

Since human beings are not angels, in order to avoid "election politics" on the part of the UP representatives, distinguished local people and social workers must be tagged with them in this endeavour. NGOs must also work in coordination with UPs. Our experience of using this arrangement for distributing relief supplies has been quite positive and confidence inspiring.

Several priorities must be kept in mind in extending help to the Sidr victims. Emergency supplies of food, water, clothes, especially winter clothes, seeds, bullocks for cultivation etc., will have to be immediately arranged. Women, children, the old and the handicapped will have to be given priority. Damaged gardens and ponds need to be cleaned. Roads must be cleared and electricity connections restored.

People must be provided financial support to restart their livelihood efforts, which the government has already initiated. Books and supplies for students must be arranged and educational institutions renovated. We must not also forget the relatively better off families, who have lost everything and are hungry, but are uncomfortable about standing in line for relief.

In the middle term, the Wapda embankments must be repaired, and they must be elevated and made stronger. Otherwise, salt water will damage the crops during the high tides in the rainy season.

In the long-term, many more cyclone shelters will have to be constructed. Houses for the victims will have to be built based on scientific designs so that they are cyclone-safe. A green belt will have to be built throughout the coastal line, for the Sundarban had greatly protected some areas from the ferocity of the cyclone.

However, cautiousness must be exercised in planting trees. Cyclone Sidr damaged alien trees like Chambal, which are very soft. Many rain trees were also uprooted -- it is alleged that polyethylene bags from the bottom of the saplings were not removed, and sometimes roots were trimmed before they were planted.

While returning from the Sidr affected districts by launch, it occurred to me as I approached Sadarghat that I was returning from one devastated area to another. In contrast to the southern districts, the devastation in the capital city is in the values and norms of its residents.

This realisation becomes more acute seeing the continued competition among the rich to occupy the banks of the Buriganga River. It became increasingly clear to me that honesty, equity and fairness etc. -- the values based on which the liberation war was fought -- are no longer held by many who live in Dhaka city's concrete jungle.

It is clearly reflected in one single political family's alleged plundering of nearly Tk.16,000 crores, which is apparently equivalent to the total loss of the cyclone Sidr. Thus, all the palatial buildings of the capital city appeared to me to be nothing more than monuments of the devastated values of their owners. If we are really to move forward as a civilised nation, we must urgently do something about restoring these disappearing values.

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Call to implement recommendations on Union Parishad

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday urged the caretaker government to implement the recommendations concerning the Union Parishad made by the committee on local government affairs. They also said the government should implement the recommendations immediately as previous governments had also taken many initiatives to strengthen Union Parishad but failed to implement them.

Swashashita Union Parishad Advocacy Group-Bangladesh organised the roundtable on 'Review on local government committee's report' at Diploma Engineers Institution in the city. Advocacy Group General Secretary Matiur Rahman Tapan said the recommendations on Union Parishad will help keep Union Parishad free from political pressure."Transparency in the activities of union parishad will be ensured if the recommendations are implemented," he said while presenting the keynote paper.

Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar, general secretary of Sushasaner Janney Nagorik (Sujon), said that although the committee's report has some weak points, the recommendations will help strengthen the Union Parishad.

Former lawmakers Golam Sarwar Milon and GM Kader, Prof Asaduzzaman and several UP chairmen also spoke at the roundtable moderated by Advocacy Group President Abul Hossain Khan.

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Call to form independent local government commission

Leaders of the Nagorik Odhikar Songrakkhon Forum on Tuesday said all the city corporations should be made autonomous and an independent local government commission be constituted to establish good governance in urban management.

The forum convenor, Sajeda Begum, put forward the proposals at a news conference held at the Dhaka Reporters Unity in the city. She also stressed the need for bringing coordination in other government and private utility agencies to provide better service for the city dwellers.

The forum recommended giving more powers to the ward commissioners and involving people in urban development activities. It also proposed that the age limit of aspirant

candidate of national elections should be increased to 30 years from the current 25 years. A three member-committee formed to strengthen local government bodies has recently submitted recommendations to the government. The committee proposed formation of a local government commission, running all the city corporations under uniform rules and regulations and allowing the ward commissioners to carry out the corporation activities in their respective areas. It also suggested that a person holding the post of mayor should not be allowed to compete in parliamentary election. The forum said the proposed local government commission should consist of five members instead of three comprising experts from different platforms, the forum convenor said. They also underscored the need for 'self-governed city corporation' and 'independent city corporation commission' to ensure good governance.

Government should form a local government commission consisting five members, including urban planning and local government experts and researchers, NASAF also recommended.

Professor Mozaffer Ahmad speaking on the occasion said the city corporations have to have full autonomy to take responsibility, earn revenue and run development activities through accountability. If the city corporations are controlled by any administrative body of the government, people will not get any benefit from the proposed commission, Prof Ahmad said. Besides, local government bodies will not be able to come out from the grip of colonial administrative control, he added. He said Dhaka is becoming larger in terms of population and proposed to make some structures like pourashava comprising some wards, which will work separately for the development of the respective wards under the monitor of the central corporation authority.

Abul Haseeb Khan, director, Resource Integration Centre, SMA Mueyed, project coordinator of RIC, and Kartik Chandra Mandal, coordinator of Manusher Jonno Foundation, among others, spoke at the press conference.

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City Corporations Draft ordinance for better utility services

Top officials of different government organisations working in the six city corporation areas will be nominated as councilors of the respective corporations for proper coordination of their activities to ensure better service to city dwellers, proposed the draft ordinance on city corporations.

Once the ordinance is promulgated making it a law, chiefs of the organisations dealing with power, gas, water, telecommunications, healthcare, housing and roads and highways, and metropolitan police will be councillors of the respective city corporations--Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet. As councillors, the government officials will not have voting rights as only elected representatives to the city corporations will have the power to decide on any matters, said the draft ordinance submitted to the chief adviser on Tuesday.

The draft prepared by the high-powered committee on strengthening the local government is intended to replace the existing laws on city corporations. It also proposed to redesignate ward commissioner as ward councillors. Members of the committee and local government experts believe that once the government organisations are directly involved in the corporations' activities, it will enable the corporations to improve their services to city dwellers. It will also largely meet the need for metropolitan governments in the city corporations. Mayors of different city corporations have been demanding formation of metropolitan governments for long to ensure proper coordination among government organisations working in the city corporation areas badly needed to provide services smoothly.

When the draft ordinance becomes law, the city corporations will be empowered to ask the chiefs of government organisations concerned to attend the corporations' meetings regularly to help make coordinated plans for their activities. The government, if necessary, can nominate other officials as councillors of the corporations in consultation with the respective corporation authorities. The draft ordinance proposes to provide the mayors authority over local police administration to maintain law and order in the corporation areas.

It provides that police officials will immediately inform the mayors or chief executive officers or secretaries of city corporations about any criminal activities or attempts to commit crimes in their respective areas. They will also act on written directives from the mayors or chief executive officers or secretaries concerned, said the proposed ordinance.

For this metropolitan police commissioners should be made councillors of the corporations, it said. The draft provides for no-confidence motion against a mayor on grounds of his or her failure to properly discharge the responsibilities. And each ward councillor will have to make public development plan for the area seeking locals' opinions on the plan.

The draft ordinance also proposed re-fixing the ceiling of election expenditure on the basis of voters in the city corporations. A mayoral candidate for Dhaka City Corporation should be allowed to spend a maximum of Tk 5 lakh for electioneering, for Chittagong City Corporation Tk 3 lakh and for the four other city corporations Tk 2 lakh each, it said.

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Importance of local government

A.B.M.S.Zahur, Former Joint Secretary

The concept of local government is not new to Bangladesh. The British attempted to introduce it as early as 1787. The permanent settlement of 1793 resulted in emergence of a system of landlords who became the local agents of the British government. In 1842, municipalities were established in some provinces of India. In 1870, the Chowkidar Panchayet Act was enacted.

In 1885, the Self-Government Act was passed. In 1907, the Royal Commission on Decentralization was constituted. Village Self-Government Act was enacted in 1919. This resulted in creation of district boards and union boards, which were strengthened in 1935.


In 1956, the number of members a union boards was raised from 8 to 11 to strengthen them. The structure of local administration was demolished with the introduction of Basic Democracy by the then dictator Gen. Ayub Khan in 1958. The Union board was renamed as Thana Council. It was again renamed as Thana Development Committee on April 28, 1972. Ziaur Rahman introduced Gram Sarkar for improving the economic condition of the common people. Ershad, who issued an Administrative Reorganisation Committee Ordinance on April 28, 1982, abolished the Thana Development Committee in 1982. Under this ordinance, thanas were upgraded and made the center of administration. Later on, another ordinance, named Upazilla and Upazilla Administrative Reorganisation (3rd amendment) Ordinance 1983, to upgrade certain thanas to Upazillas, and a Upazilla Parishad was set up for each upazilla. In June 1989, the Palli Parishad Act was passed for every village.

During 1991-2006 we heard political statements from time to time for strengthening local government. In reality, no progress could be seen due to opposition of the party/parties in power, because law makers do not like to give up power to the local government as they feel that thereby they may lose their influence on the people of their constituencies. Thus, we are not hopeful of strengthening local government under an elected government.

Our only hope is the CTG, which has successfully separated the judiciary from the grip of the executive. The statement of the CA for strengthening local government to take its services to people's doorsteps and bringing transparency and accountability in all sectors is encouraging and inspiring.

The preliminary work to take up the task of strengthening local government has already been done by a high-powered committee headed by Dr. Shawkat Ali. It recommended, inter alia, a three-tier local government system, and outlined qualifications for aspirants to local government bodies. It also suggested setting up of an independent commission for effective decentralisation and removal of bureaucratic tangles.

The local political systems are usually more important than the national, insofar as they enable the citizens to have a feeling of contact with the government, and act as a training ground for future statesmen and politicians. Experience of administration on local level



can teach someone about political action, which helps him to better understand the needs of the wider community. In this way, local politics affords invaluable opportunities, and gives an insight into wider political activity and political justice. Local political venues are important arenas for political education in general.

Our future statesmen and politicians, on becoming familiar with the world of politics and political affairs, can stand up to pressure and the tides of national fortune. They develop a political reliance, which is a critical national asset. This, in turn, helps the smooth political development of the country. Within the smallest political unit, the people get a better chance to know the art of politics, which ultimately brightens the prospect of their political leadership at the national level. Thereby, the cause of democracy is also served.

Local politics is very important for the political development of Bangladesh, particularly to strengthen its base for democracy. By making people politically conscious, it enables the people to establish a democratic society and administrative system. Local politics is different from national politics. In Bangladesh politics, the influence of political opportunists is prominent because the national level politicians are benefited by local level leaders who are usually elected on the strength of their wealth and muscle power, and not for their love and respect for the people.

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